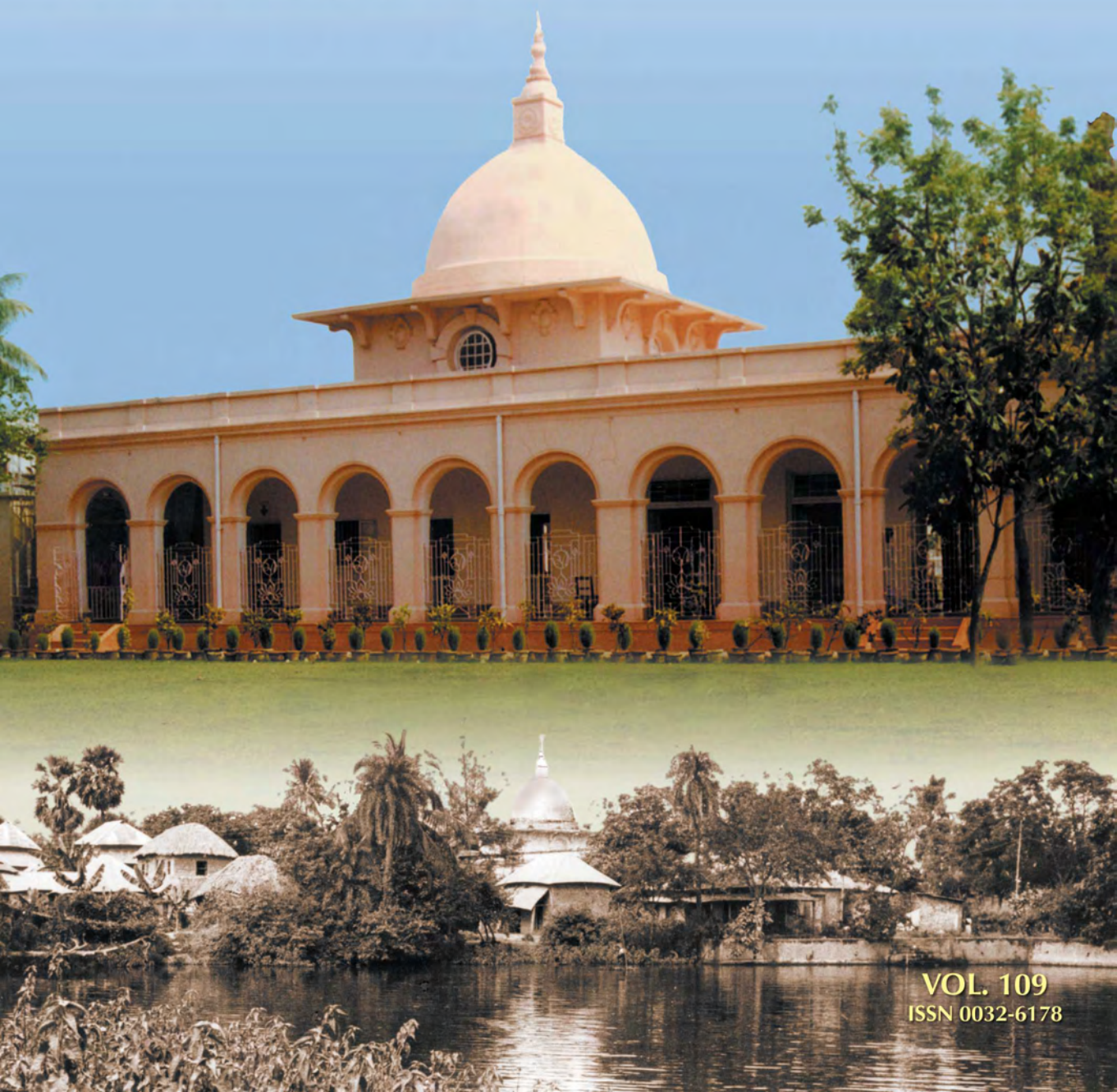


PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*



**APRIL
2004**

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat
Dt. Champawat-262 524

Uttaranchal

E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama

5 Dehi Entally Road,

Kolkata 700 014

Ph: 91-33-22440898 / 22452383 / 22164000

Fax: 22450050

E-mail: pb@advaitaonline.com

Cover: Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati seen today and a period photograph in the foreground. Mother was born in this sanctified village for the good of all Her children in 1853.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 109

APRIL 2004

No. 4

❧ Traditional Wisdom ❧

DETACHMENT

शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् ।
कामक्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥

He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even while living in the body—he is a yogi, he is a happy man. (*Bhagavadgita*, 5.23)

On being asked when the enemies of man, such as lust and anger, will be vanquished, the Master replied, ‘So long as these passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they behave like enemies. But when they are directed towards God, they become the best friends of man, for then they lead him unto God. The lust for the things of the world must be changed into the hankering for God. ... These passions cannot be eradicated but can be educated.’ (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 138)

A monk must always be alert. The path of the monk is slippery. While one is on a slippery road, one should walk tiptoe. If you had so desired, you could have married and lived as a householder. Now that you have given up such an intention, the mind should not be allowed to think of worldly things. What has been spat out is not eaten again. The ochre robe protects a monk as the collar protects a dog. No one molests a dog with a collar, as it belongs to somebody else. The monk with his ochre robe belongs to God. All gates are open to a monk. He has admission everywhere. A monk should be above attachment and jealousy. He must remain unruffled under all circumstances. (Holy Mother)

Everyone has to work in this world; no one can escape from it. But he who works for his own selfish ends—instead of liberating him from the trap of maya, his work binds him. On the other hand, working for the Lord, the wise man cuts the fetters of work. (Swami Turiyananda)

∞ This Month ∞

True fearlessness arises from Self-realization, says Vedanta. Till then fear is inevitable. **From Fear to Fearlessness**, this month's editorial, examines certain useful fears a spiritual aspirant can benefit by in his journey towards fearlessness.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features an article entitled 'Great Men and Society' by 'Indian' and some clippings from 'News and Notes'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 13 to 18 of the ninth chapter of the *Gita*, explaining how great souls worship God, the concept of jnana-yajna and how the Lord is our all in all.

In the second part of his travelogue **A Visit to Europe** Swami Smarananandaji describes his visits to Holland, Germany and Switzerland. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Despite being an unlettered village woman Sri Sarada Devi remains the ideal for modern woman—Swami Sunirmalanandaji analyses this paradox in his **Aspects of Holy Mother**. A former editor of this journal, the author teaches at the monastic probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math.

Personality of Swami Vivekananda as Revealed through His Letters is a survey by Sri Dushyanta Pandya of Swamiji's letters from the nine volumes of his *Complete Works*. The article admirably portrays the different facets of Swamiji's multifaceted personality: his loving, paternal guidance to Sisters Nive-

dita and Christine; his instructions to his brother disciples on how to steer the fledgling Ramakrishna Order—all this amid his hectic work in the West; his filial affection for the heads of the Hale family and brotherly love for the Hale sisters; his personal request to the Maharaja of Khetri; and his response to Sturdy's criticism. The author is a devotee from Rajkot, with several decades of devoted association with the activities of the ashrama there.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras—An Exposition is a commentary by Swami Premeshanandaji on sutras 23 to 47 of the third chapter, 'Vibhūti Pāda'. Sri Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee, translator of the original Bengali notes, is a former Professor of Statistics from Calcutta University.

Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad is the sixth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji. The distinction between the five elements and their universal substratum, and a sannyasin's spiritual experiences—these are discussed in this month's instalment. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary. The author is Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur.

The first set of incidents in **Glimpses of Holy Lives** relate to Jyoti Pant, about whom we saw in the last two issues. The Lord promises in the *Bhagavadgita* that he carries what his devotees lack and preserves what they have, if they just have one-pointed devotion to Him. The second life featured in this section, that of Kungiliyak-kalaya Nayanar, one of the sixty-three Tamil Shaiva saints, vindicates this promise. *

From Fear to Fearlessness

EDITORIAL

A mother could not get her son to get home before sunset. So she told him that the road to their house was haunted by ghosts, who came out after dusk. By the time the boy grew up he was so afraid of ghosts that he refused to run errands at night. So she gave him a medal and taught him that it would protect him.

Bad religion gives him faith in the medal. Good religion gets him to see that ghosts do not exist.

Fear is an important emotion common to human beings and animals. If one fears darkness, another fears solitude; some fear water, flying, heights of buildings and so on. Phobias are unreasonable fears, not all of which might be harmful. Some phobias, however, leave a permanent scar in the human psyche. Does religion address this important human emotion?

The Keynote of the Upanishads

All fears necessarily involve a subject and an object: I and the object of fear. Vedanta says that fear will persist as long as we are conscious of an object different from us. And these objects include our own body and mind, of which the subject, the witness, is the Atman. 'It is from a second entity that fear comes,' says the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*.² And in the words of the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, 'When a man finds fearless support in That which is invisible, formless, indefinable and supportless, he has then attained fearlessness. If he makes the slightest differentiation in It, there is fear for him.'³

Swami Vivekananda's teachings are laced and fortified with fearlessness. He could never suffer weakness in anyone. He considered fearlessness as one of the essential fea-

tures of Hindu scriptures. During his wandering days in 1892 Swamiji spent nine days with Sri Sundararama Iyer in Trivandrum. Sri Iyer's 14-year-old son Ramaswami Sastri was deeply impressed by Swamiji's personality. Swamiji told him one day, 'You are still a young boy, I hope and wish that you will reverentially study the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavadgita* ... as also the Itihasas, the Puranas and the Agamas. You will not find the like of these anywhere in the world. Man alone, of all living creatures, has a hunger in his heart to know the whence and whither, the whys and wherefores of things. There are four key words you must remember: *abhaya* (fearlessness), *ahimsā* (non-injury), *asaṅga* (non-attachment) and *ānanda* (bliss). These words really sum up the essence of all our sacred books. Remember them. Their implication will become clear to you later on.'⁴

Fear has to be our inevitable companion as long as the world appears real to us. Bhartrihari's *Vairagya Shataka* portrays this truth admirably: 'In enjoyment is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling off; in wealth, the fear of hostile kings; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of enemies; in beauty, the fear of old age; in scholarship, the fear of opponents; in virtue, the fear of calumny; and in body, the fear of death. Everything in this world is fraught with fear. Renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.'⁵

Only when man realizes his eternal, true Self does he realize that he is not subject to death, that he is not a finite human being with a body and mind, but the infinite Consciousness Itself. After imparting instructions to Janaka about Brahman, Yajñavalkya assured him, 'You have attained That which is free from fear.'⁶

Fearlessness as a Spiritual Trait

In the *Bhagavadgita* catalogue of divine qualities fearlessness tops the list.⁷ While Sri Shankaracharya and Sri Shridara Svamin explain *abhaya* as just absence of fear, Sri Ramanuja and Sant Jnaneshvar offer some detailed explanation.

Equipoise in pleasure and pain: According to Sri Ramanuja, 'Fear is the pain resulting from the awareness of the cause that brings about pain in the form of dissociation from the objects of attainment or association with the objects of aversion. The absence of this is fearlessness.'⁸ The mind has its pet likes and dislikes. It always likes pleasure-producing stimuli and dislikes contrary ones. Right from ushering in the New Year to any of our everyday joys—physical as well as mental—every event signals party time for most people. But just an unpleasant event, a piece of bad news or silly criticism is enough to drive them crazy and to a corner, to bemoan their fate. That is how the mind is programmed to react. And programmed life is the lot of those who let circumstances and events determine their reactions.

Fearlessness necessitates writing a new programme with the help of buddhi, the discriminative faculty. This means augmenting good mental impressions (*samskaras*) with noble thoughts and actions, and strengthening our character. Only a strong character can help us remain independent of external events.

That is why the *Gita* emphasizes equipoise amid work—a mindset that prevents us from feeling elated with pleasure and depressed with pain. When a despondent Arjuna was overcome with misplaced compassion for his enemies, Sri Krishna goaded him to perform his dharma: 'Pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat—looking upon all this alike, engage yourself in battle; you will incur no sin.'⁹ A potent means to acquire equipoise is to offer everything—both pleasure and pain—to the Lord: '*Yadyad-karma karomi tattad-akhilam śambho tavārāadhanam*; whatever

I do, O Shiva, all that is Your worship.'¹⁰ And in the words of Sri Krishna, 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you offer as gifts, whatever austerities you perform—do that all as an offering to Me.'¹¹

The spirit of non-dualism, freedom from egoism: In the *Jnaneshvari*, his celebrated commentary on the *Gita*, Sant Jnaneshvar explains fearlessness:

Just as a person who does not leap into a great flood is not afraid of being drowned, or one who follows the prescribed diet does not feel concerned about being ill, so he who has no egotistic feeling while performing actions or not performing them, has no fear of worldly existence. When his mind is filled with the notion of non-dualism, he knows that the whole world is pervaded by Brahman and discards fear.¹²

A true karma yogi knows the secret of work: freedom from attachment to work and renouncing the fruits of action. When a spiritual aspirant offers the fruits of his actions to God, he ceases to have fear or anxiety about the outcome. And 'the notion of non-dualism' implies a strong faith in one's real nature, the Atman. During our initial spiritual struggles, it is enough if we go about our activities looking upon ourselves as a luminous spiritual entity different from our body and the wayward mind. This amounts to identification with buddhi, the discriminative faculty. The sattvic worker outlined in the *Gita* is the ideal for a spiritual aspirant: 'He who is free from attachment and egotism, endowed with fortitude and zeal, and is unaffected by success and failure—such a person is said to be a sattvic worker.'¹³

Some Useful Fears

We saw that fearlessness is synonymous with the ultimate Reality. Till one realizes that Reality, however, one is within the domain of maya and is hence subject to duality and fear. It is needless to say that a spiritual aspirant should steer clear of unreasonable fears of all

kinds. This he accomplishes with faith in his higher Self and in the indwelling God. Cultivating fears of the healthy and right kind can help him in his march towards his spiritual ideal. Says the well-known Tamil classic *Tirukkural*, 'It is foolish not to fear what is to be feared. It is the duty of the wise to fear such things.'¹⁴ In other words, wise ones are conscious of pitfalls and dangers in life and do not make light of them. It is useful to keep in mind the implication of fear in the above discussion. What is meant is not fear per se, but the need to be cautious of traps in spiritual life. What are such snares that a spiritual aspirant cannot be too careful about?

All-powerful Maya

'Verily the divine Mahamaya forcibly draws the minds of even jnanis and throws them into delusion,' cautions the *Devi Mahatmya*.¹⁵ The Puranas are replete with stories of how holy men succumbed to the lures of maya. A spiritual aspirant can never be too careful about maya. What is maya? In simple words, maya denotes life in the world characterized by attachment arising from a strong sense of 'I' and 'mine'. Sri Ramakrishna reduced maya to just two things: lust and greed. In the words of the *Gita*, hell has a threefold gate: lust, anger and greed.¹⁶ Sri Krishna further cautions against maya: 'This divine maya of mine is composed of the three gunas and difficult to cross. Only those who take refuge in Me cross this maya.'¹⁷

Sri Ramakrishna was an example of burning renunciation of lust and greed. He advised his disciples to steer clear of these impediments to spiritual life. How maya drags down an aspirant unawares, he illustrated with an example: 'Once I went to the Fort in a carriage, feeling all the while that I was going along a level road. At last I found that I had gone four storeys down.'¹⁸

A spiritual aspirant is careful about the all-powerful maya and struggles to strengthen weaker links in his character. He never

commits the mistake of being overconfident about his capacity to be free from maya's enticements.

Sri Ramakrishna never tired of cautioning his disciples, 'Holy man, beware!' Addressing his devotees he remarked once, '... a man must be extremely careful during the early stages of spiritual discipline. Then he must live far away from any woman. He must not go too close to one even if she is a great devotee of God. You see, a man must not sway his body while climbing to the roof; he may fall.'¹⁹

The Power of Samskaras

Our every thought and action leaves a subtle impression in the mind, called samskara. With every repetition of the thought or action, the impression gets deepened. It is the sum total of these impressions that determines our character, says Swamiji. If the sum total is positive, the character is good; if negative, bad.

An important property of these impressions is the tendency to repeat the action or thought that gave rise to them in the first place. A spiritual aspirant is cautious about this tendency and is careful in not gathering more bad impressions. By selfless work and devotion he counteracts his bad impressions. With regular spiritual practice he disciplines his mind and learns not to be swayed by past impressions. He avoids circumstances that could trigger old impressions or disturb his mind in any way. How faithfully Swami Adbhutananda (Latu Maharaj) followed his guru's instructions is evident from the following incident.

Sri Ramakrishna once told Latu, 'Be careful about wine and about lust and gold. These things are obstacles that create doubts about God. A person who meditates after taking intoxicants and a yogi who is attached to women are both hypocrites and only deceive themselves.'²⁰ While going one day from Dakshineswar to Ram Babu's house in Calcutta, La-

tu's mind became restless while passing a wine shop on the way. When he reported it to the Master he said, 'The odour of the wine caused restlessness in your mind. Avoid it from now on.' Latu followed the Master's instruction literally, taking a circuitous route to Calcutta from then on, which meant double the usual distance of four miles.

The Inexorability of Karma

Another important property of samskaras is the accrual of *karma-phala* (fruits of actions) with unerring certainty. According to a well-known verse, 'As a calf among a thousand cows finds out the mother kine/ So deeds performed good or bad will come and say I'm thine.' The thought of having to suffer the fruits of one's good and bad actions of this life and of an unknown number of lives earlier, is mind-boggling, to say the least. But the situation is not all that bleak. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi assures us that repetition of God's name is a great help in minimizing the intensity of karma. When a disciple asked her if the effect of karma performed in previous lives could be cancelled by the repetition of God's name, she said, 'One must experience the effect of past action. None can escape it. But japa minimizes its intensity. For example, a man who, as a result of his past karma, is destined to lose his leg, may instead suffer from the prick of a thorn in his foot.'²¹ A spiritual aspirant is conscious of the inevitability of karma and tries not to accrue new bad karmas; he is careful in his thoughts, words and actions.

Fear of Slander

Once we consider something a necessary evil, gradually it becomes more and more necessary and less and less evil. And there are philosophies to justify one's actions. Such an attitude can be cultivated only at the cost of one's character. Ever conscious that a strict moral life is a prerequisite to spiritual life, an aspirant does not engage himself in question-

able actions. Aware that when character is lost everything is lost, he tries to conduct himself in a way that is beyond reproach.

* * *

True fearlessness is synonymous with the ultimate Reality. Till we realize that Truth, we are in the domain of maya and are subject to fear. Cultivation of the fears of the right kind can help us in our journey towards fearlessness. *

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April 1904

Great Men and Society

Thoughts are the parents of our actions. Every movement of the muscles of an individual is a manifestation of energy originating in his thought. Some hold that the individual and his world are the creation of his own thought. A man is man because he thinks himself so. Each thought has its antithesis and its actualization implies actualization of the antithesis. The thought 'I am man' is attended with its antithesis 'I am not not-man.' By actualization of the former man feels that he is man. By simultaneous actualization of the latter is created his world which answers to the element 'not-man' in it. Whether this creative potency of our thought is sufficient to explain the origin of ourselves and our worlds, thus relegating the conception of the Creator to the realm of superstitions, it is not easy to answer. Seeing that our actions are always preceded by thoughts, it may be safely put as a truism that no action is possible without a preceding thought corresponding to it and it may be asserted with some force that our actions are manifestations of our thought-power.

Before thoughts take a definite shape, when we can feel them, they pass through fine forms of which we are not conscious. Thoughts in their fine state are said to be in the subconscious part of the mind.

The thought-power of an individual works through a particular brain. As, in Physics, a resultant force is obtained by the composition of two or more component forces and the actions of the component forces are regarded as those of the resultant, so the thought-power of a nation may be regarded as the resultant of the thought-powers of the individuals composing it, their brains as the different centres through which it works and their works as the works of the national thought-power.

When a national crisis happens, in which the interests of a nation, religious or secular, are at stake, or when betterment of the existing conditions of a nation is to be brought about by the process of national evolution, a wave of yearning for a new state of things rises in the national mind. At first, it works subconsciously. When it rises to the conscious part of the mind and grows intense, the whole nation as one opposes the progress of the evil with or without success or helps the advent of the better state.

Great men are the centres in which the thoughts of a nation take a definite shape, best suited to the fulfilment of its yearnings. It is believed by many that they are called forth into existence by a strong thought-power of the collective mind of the nation for which they work. That they are highly developed souls equipped with body and mind ready to imbibe the prevailing tendencies of the national mind, and strong enough to be the fittest mediums for the mighty national thought-power to manifest its great activities through, is undeniable. Their actions are the products of the thoughts and aspirations of their times.

Though in the long run the actions of great men result in bettering the condition of the nation, not unoften do they appear unfriendly and injurious to its interests and many not possessed of the insight to see into the depth of things, look upon such great men as national enemies and form false and mistaken notions of their actions. Such has been the case with great men like Raja Rammohan Roy and Swami Dayananda Sarasvati and others. When before the onrush of Christianity with its powerful organization for proselytism and of Western materialism irreverently trying to shake the foundation of

everything spiritual, the more forward sections of Indian society lost their balance and, unable to grasp the meaning of their ancient religion, began to misunderstand and doubt its truths, their collective mind was shaken to the very bottom, and there rose in the national mind a wave of yearning for regaining the lost balance. The thought-power of the nation found in Raja Rammohan Roy and Swami Dayananda the mediums of its work. They worked; and all glory to them for it. Their methods of work seemed hostile to the religion of the land. But such methods were necessary, as best suited to meet the exigencies of their times. Was not their hostility but friendship in disguise? But for the Brahmo and the Arya Samajs, many would have embraced Christianity or become the worst agnostics. The Samajs have the blood of Hinduism in them. They are the sons, only rebel sons of the mother religion. Such rebellion has been indispensable to defend the Mother against foreign attacks. The far-seeing Hindu far from being hostile to a Brahmo or an Arya, regards him with love and gratitude as his own brother who has been compelled by the national thought-power to leave the family home to meet his common Mother's enemy in the enemy's own camp.

Time has necessitated the adoption of such hostile methods by the national mind; time will record whether, when the need for them will be over, those movements will be absorbed like Buddhism back into the mother religion or continue to flourish as independent growths.

Our attitude towards great men should be one of absolute obedience. Theirs is to lead the way and ours 'but to do and die'. The national thought-power, heedless of the interests of an individual or a particular section of the community, tries to further the interests of the nation. Great men being the centres to which the best portion of the thought-power converges for manifestation, helping them means helping such manifestation and, therefore, furtherance of the interests of the nation. The duty of him who has the good of his nation at heart, though he may fail to understand the workings of the thought-power through the great men, is to follow their plan and method of work, without stopping 'to reason why', with readiness to sacrifice wealth, name, home comforts and affections, even life, if necessary.

—Indian

The fourth annual Anandotsava of Sri Ramakrishna Deva was celebration on the 3rd April at the Ananda-Kanana, in Entally, Calcutta.

We are glad to note the progress of Vedanta work in Madras under the care of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Eight classes of one hour and a half each are held every week in different parts of the city, three on the *Bhagavadgita*, two on the Upanishads, two on the *Bhagavata* and one on the *Panchadashi*.

Alaw passed in Norway in 1899 prohibits the sale of tobacco to anyone under the age of fifteen years. In Prince Edward Island the sale of tobacco in any form to a minor under sixteen years is forbidden. Any minor under that age who has in his possession or smokes tobacco is liable to a fine of five dollars or seven days' imprisonment. Bermuda imposes a small penalty on persons selling tobacco, cigars or cigarettes to children under sixteen years of age. In France numerous societies have been formed for the suppression of this growing habit, and the French government has absolutely prohibited the use of tobacco in all its schools.

Doors made entirely of paper are used in some of the modern dwellings in French cities. They are finished to resemble any kind of wood, and there is no warping, shrinking or cracking.

—From 'News and Notes'

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 9 (*continued*)

13. But, O Partha, the great-souled ones, possessing the divine Nature, knowing Me as immutable and as the source of beings, worship Me with single-minded devotion.

The great-souled ones, the mahatmas, those who are of sattvic, purified mind, My faithful bhaktas, who walk in the path of moksha, regarding Me as their own innermost Self; those who possess the divine Nature, the nature of the devas; who have control over body, speech, mind and senses; who

are kind, charitable and full of faith—they know Me as unchangeable, as the origin of all beings, of all living creatures and also as the origin of the elements of matter. Knowing Me thus, they worship Me with single-minded devotion. How do they worship Me? This is stated in the next verse.

14. Ever singing my glory and striving with firm resolve, bowing down to Me in devotion, always steadfast, they worship Me.

They always talk of Me, their Lord. They ever strive subjugating their senses, cultivating virtues such as self-control, kindness and innocence. Firm in their resolves, they worship Me with love, Me who am their very self, abiding in their hearts. These bhaktas are of unswerving faith. They are convinced that their mode of worship is the very best, and they persevere in it to the end. There are different ways of worship, as we shall see in the next verse, but the devotee is true to his own method. Other modes of worship are not evil, for after all it is the Lord who is worshipped. Still he regards the form of his Chosen Deity as the best and therefore he is faithful to his own form of worship.

Sri Ramakrishna lays much stress on the necessity of persevering in the path chosen. It matters not which path. But once we set out, we must go to the end. Having put the hand to the plough, we must not look back. He used to say, 'It matters not whether you believe in God with form or in the formless Brahman. All will see Him if they have faith and perseverance.' 'But thou must cry unto the Lord,' he says,

'with a longing and yearning heart, whether thou believeth that God is with form or without form. The Lord is the Ruler of the soul within and He shall grant thy prayer if thy cry goes forth to Him out of the innermost recesses of thy heart.' And he tells a story to illustrate that changing our view and efforts leads us nowhere.

There was a man who wanted to sink a well. He began to dig, but after going down a few feet, he stopped and began to dig somewhere else, thinking to get water there quicker. Again he dug a few feet and, finding the soil quite dry, changed to another place. So he went on and when night came he had dug many holes a few feet deep, but there was no water anywhere. Had he however persevered in one place he would have gone down many feet and water would have been obtained, whereas now his day's labour was lost.

Fluttering about, now here now there, going to hear this lecture and that, trying a little of this and of that, is only waste of energy and brings no lasting results. First find out what appeals to you as the highest Truth. And

having once decided, penetrate to the very depth of that Truth. This also Sri Ramakrishna illustrates with a story.

A woodcutter who made his living by cutting and selling wood was one day accosted by a brahmacharin. All that the brahmacharin said was, 'Enter deeper into the forest.' The woodcutter came home with his load of wood and sold it as usual in the market. But he thought, what may the holy man have meant by saying, 'Enter deeper into the forest?' Some days passed and then he thought, well, let me do as I was bidden. And he went deeper into the forest to cut wood. And what was his surprise when he found that that portion of the forest was full of sandalwood trees! He brought cartloads of sandalwood to the market and soon grew rich. Again time passed when once more he was reminded of the words of the brahmacharin. And so he decided to go still farther in the forest and see what may be there. And then he found a silver mine. This he had never expected. He was overjoyed and he began to work the mine diligently. Soon he became a very wealthy man. But once more, after the lapse of some years, the words of the holy man came back to him. He thought, the holy man did not tell me to

stop at the silver mine, but to go deeper into the forest. This time he came to a river and, crossing it, found a gold mine and finally a mine of diamonds. 'So,' says Sri Ramakrishna, 'go ahead, my children, and never lose sight of your ideal. Go onward and never stop until you have reached the goal.' Then, 'All doubts vanish forever and all the crookedness of the heart is made straight, and all bondages vanish and karma ceases to bear fruit, when He is seen, who is both high and low (the cause and the effect).'¹

Vedanta is the broadest of all religions and at the same time it insists on sincerity and intensity. Follow any religion you please, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism; worship any divine Incarnation, Jesus or Buddha, Krishna or Ramakrishna, but be sincere. For the scriptures teach us that 'Whomsoever you may worship with singleness of heart and devotion as the one God of the universe, in whatever form, as Rama, Vishnu, Shiva or others, you will get moksha.'

We will now see how the Lord is worshipped in different ways. Sri Krishna has spoken of the bhaktas of pure heart who worship God as the source of all beings. And now:

15. Others, again, by performing the wisdom sacrifice (jnana-yajna) worship Me, the All-facing, as One, as separate or in manifold forms.

Others, those who know Me to be All-facing or All-formed, that is, those who know Me as having assumed all the manifold forms in the universe—they worship Me performing the wisdom sacrifice. Every practice is a sacrifice. And this wisdom sacrifice is the practice of seeing the Self, the Atman, in all. This is the wisdom (jnana) to see God or the Mother of the universe. As the Soul of all souls, the Reality of all manifestations, God is our Mother. We are Her children, sprung from Her, spirit of Her spirit, life of Her life. But amongst Her children She is worshipped in different ways. Some worship Her as 'One'. That is the Advaita view, where God

is known as the only Existence, identical with the Consciousness within man, divested of all attributes ascribed to It by error, or *avidyā*. They always try to remember that 'Brahman alone exists. He is Truth, Knowledge and Bliss, eternal and immortal. Whatever manifests is He, the One without a second.'

God is the crystal in which we all gaze. You gaze in a crystal and you see perhaps an ocean and on that ocean a ship sailing. I gaze in the same crystal and see a forest and mountains, another sees a desert, and still another, the face of one he loves. We all have our views. The crystal is one and the same, pure and stainless. It is a picture of our mind that we see

reflected in it. We see the ocean and the forest and the desert, but know that they are not real. They exist in our mind somewhere. God is One, pure and stainless. But we see the universe, virtue and vice, good and evil, pleasure and pain. A change of mental vibration and the whole scene vanishes. In dreamless sleep, the universe is not. In samadhi the universe fades away, but God remains, pure and stainless. He is the canvas on which we paint our pictures. To see the canvas we have to wash off the paint. To see God, we have to wash the mind clean of all dirt. All evil thoughts and tendencies have to be washed off. As is the picture, so does the canvas appear to us. Everything is coloured by our mind. As we think of God, so will we see Him: you in one way, I in another.

I once saw an insane person who spent his entire day painting landscapes. He would take a mass of different paints, smear it on the canvas and then would stand back and, highly pleased, would admire his piece of art. One canvas after another he would finish. He saw beauty where others could see only a mixture of paints. The pictures were in his mind and the canvas reflected them. The universe is in our mind. We look at God and our universe is reflected in Him. We have to clean the mind first and remove from there all pictures—only then can we see God. *Avidyā*, ignorance, gives colour to the mind. When that ignorance is removed through religious practices and discrimination, then Truth shines. The rose held near the crystal colours the crystal. Remove the rose if you wish to see the crystal's clearness.

This is the wisdom-sacrifice of the Advaitin, seeing God and God alone, no paint, no roses, no pictures, but God pure and simple and Him always and everywhere. Wisdom is the greatest purifier.

Others, says Sri Krishna, worship Me as separate from themselves. These are the dualists who make a distinction between God and themselves. The Lord is the vine; they are the

branches. The Lord is the Beloved; they are the lovers. The Lord is the door; they are the sheep that enter, eternally united with God and eternally separate from Him. They keep their own individuality and so they enjoy the presence of the Lord.

Others, again, worship Me as manifold, as various divinities, Brahmā, Rudra and so on. And there are some who worship the Lord as the Spirit of the universe. The universe is His body, as seen by Arjuna and described in the eleventh chapter.

The following verses explain how it is possible that with so much variety of methods of worship and beliefs, still one and the same Lord is worshipped by all.

The Truth is that God is everything and everywhere. He is all energy manifesting on different planes, all life and all beings. Where is He not? What is He not? Once a sage was asked the question, 'Sir, where is God?' The sage replied, 'Sir, tell me where God is not?' He is everywhere and everything. It is our misfortune that we cannot see Him. Having eyes we do not see, because of the impurity of our mind. Every act and the result of every act and the instrument used in the performance of every act is God. Blessed is the sage who realizes it. His heart flows out in love towards everything. The wise and the ignorant, the cultured and the vulgar, the strong and the weak, the beautiful and the ugly, nay, animate and inanimate creation is enfolded in his love. There was a saint in India who was so conscious of God's presence everywhere that it hurt him to tread on the grass and little flowers. To him the grass was alive with God. For such jnanis there is no wicked and no virtuous, no good and no bad. Everything is covered with the Lord. All shines; all vibrates with divinity. The thief, the murderer, earthquake, cyclone, disease, famine—these are all God in His terrible aspect; just as the mother with her baby, the child playing in the sunshine, and the harvest and green fields, are God in His lovable aspect.

We cannot understand it now. But the sage who has seen beyond maya, he does. Our ignorance, our wickedness and our blindness, all is God. It is His maya, His power inseparable from Him, as heat is inseparable from fire. To *us* all this seems terrible; not so to the sage. The child sees a murder in the moving picture and it begins to cry. But *we* understand and smile. We also weep sometimes at the sadness of a tale, until we rouse ourselves and we smile. What was too terrible to us in the tale while we were under the author's spell did not mean anything to us after we had shaken off the spell. What seems horrible to us in this world-plan does not seem horrible to the man of realization. But he cannot make us understand until we grow up spiritually.

We are colour-blind, but we do not know it. Neither can we believe it. We speak of matter and force, but science tells us it is one and the same energy. But we cannot believe it. How can a piece of iron be called force? It seems absurd till we learn to understand. How can God be vice and ugliness and disease? It seems absurd till we understand that vice and ugliness and disease are our interpretation of God. In Reality they do not exist. They are connected with the body, with matter. But matter is a dream. Brahman alone is real. The Spirit alone *is*. All else is a passing delusion.

There was a sage who proclaimed that life was a dream; it had no existence in reality. Once a number of boys got hold of him and dragged him through the streets. Then they sneered at him and laughed at his distressed condition; and one said, 'Well, sir, it is all a dream. How do you like the dream?' The sage answered, 'Yes it *is* a dream, but a painful dream.'

While I was living in one of the monasteries in India, a strange thing happened. One of the monks was a consumptive and the doctor had ordered that he sleep outside. And so he did. He slept on the porch of the second storey of the building. The country there was infested

with tigers. We used to hear them at times. One night it happened that the sick monk heard what he thought was a tiger and, nervous at the idea that the tiger might leap on the porch, he went to awaken another monk, intending to take his bed inside. Now the other monk was half awake when the sick monk entered his room. In that semi-conscious condition he imagined that he saw the sick monk's ghost. He became thoroughly frightened and called out for help at the top of his voice. The sick monk tried to calm him. He approached him gently and spoke to him and wanted to touch him. But all this the frightened monk took to be the ghost. And the nearer the monk approached, the more frightened he became and the louder he screamed. The sick monk tried to convince him that he was not a ghost but his sick brother. But nothing could convince the deluded monk, until at last he was thoroughly awake. As long as he was semi-conscious, the only reasonable explanation of the sick monk's presence in his room was the ghost. The idea that it was the real monk seemed utterly absurd to him until he awoke.

As long as we are dreaming this life existence, it is a most real existence, and nothing can convince us that it is not what we think it to be. But even then so long as we insist that all these conditions exist, we cannot reasonably separate them from God. If we say that the world is real, that life is real, and so are health and sickness and good and evil, then, when all this is real, it must come from God. Nay, it must *be* God. 'I am the Lord and there is none else. ... I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me: That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things.'²

What happens? We see golden ornaments. Beautiful and ugly we call them, but the gold tester sees only gold in them. To him

there are no ornaments, ugly or beautiful. He sees so much weight in gold. We believe our senses, but our senses deceive us. Ignorance is the great deceiver. It is *maya*. It makes us see things differently from what they are. And this whole creation is *maya*. It draws our attention away from God, the Reality, and makes us see a phenomenal world. The actor becomes so identified with his act that he regards his fellow actor as a real scoundrel and kills him on the stage. It seems impossible but it has happened. This is *maya*. The other train moves out of the depot, but we think that our train is moving. The earth moves, but we think that the sun moves. We whirl through space, but we think we are stationary.

We are like the little boy who asked his mother to tell him a story for his diversion. And the mother told him of three princes who were never born and who went hunting in the forest without trees. They came to a river without water and as they were tired and warm, they enjoyed a cool bath in the river. After a long time they reached a city without buildings; the buildings were constructed without roofs or walls. In one of these houses they took shelter, for rain came down in torrents—well, so the story goes on, all nonsense and impossible, but the boy enjoyed the story and believed it all. It seemed quite possible and natural to him.

So we must not be surprised that we cannot understand how God can be all these things. In time we will realize the Truth and then all becomes simple and natural and we will smile. Until then, we must have a little faith in the holy scriptures and the words of holy men who claim to have realized the Truth, who claim to speak from experience. And then when our desire to know for ourselves becomes very strong and we begin to

live a truly spiritual life, the Truth will be revealed to us bit by bit, flash after flash, and we will begin to construct the whole; it will all become clear at last. In *samadhi* these great revelations come, in deep meditation. And then we will be at rest. We will know peace and contentment. That contentment is called *santosha*. It means freedom from aversion. Then the mind draws away from sense objects and goes towards the Atman. And that peace is called *shanti*. It is that sweet patience that nothing can ruffle. All desires and sorrows fly as twilight before the rising sun. The virtuous and vicious alike confide in him who experiences this, says the *Yoga Vasishtha*. Such realized souls remain the same under all conditions, the same in pleasure and pain. They know that Brahman alone is all this universe. As one lump of gold is converted into many ornaments, so from the Unborn all this is born. They know the truth that nothing can exist outside of God. He is All in all, the beginning, the middle and the end. 'Existence alone existed, O Beloved, nothing else existed in the beginning.'³

We have seen what is meant by *jnana-yajna*, the wisdom-sacrifice: how the highest *bhaktas* see God as the Self in all beings. And Sri Krishna has said that some worship Him (who assumes all the manifold forms of the universe) as One, identifying themselves with the Lord who assumes all forms. These hold to the Advaita view, while others worship God as distinct from themselves. This is the dualistic view, which makes a distinction in essence between the Lord and His devotee. Still others worship God as various deities like *Brahmā* and *Rudra*.

Let us see now in what different forms and capacities the Lord manifests Himself. Sri Krishna says in verse sixteen:

16. I am *kratu*, I am *yajna*, I am *svadhā*, I am *auśadha*, I am the mantra, I am the article of oblation, I am the fire and I am the act of offering.

The meaning is that the Lord is everything connected with religious offerings, *kratu*, a particular Vedic rite; *yajna*, the worship enjoined in the *smritis*; *svadhā*, the food offered to 17.

the ancestors; *auśadha*, all vegetable food and medicinal herbs; mantra, the chant with which oblation is offered or any text by repeating and

meditating on which one is purified; the article of oblation; the fire into which the offering is poured; and the oblation itself. Further:

I am the Father of the universe, the Mother, the Sustainer, the Grandsire, the One to be known, the Purifier, the syllable Om, the *ṛk*, the *sāma* and the *yaju*.

God is the Father of the universe and He is also the Mother. He is Purusha and also Prakriti. Purusha and Prakriti, as we have seen, are the two aspects of God. We cannot think of the one without the other. They are both necessary for the production of the universe. The one is powerless without the other. It is only through this dual aspect of God that creation becomes possible. The two must be in conjunction to produce the phenomenal universe. Purusha is called the Father and Prakriti, the Mother. God is both our Father and Mother. And there is a beautiful verse where God is regarded not only as Fa-

ther and Mother, but also as Friend and Companion and the devotee's greatest Treasure. 'Thou art our Father. Thou art our Mother. Thou art our Friend. Thou art our Companion. Thou art our Learning. Thou art our Wealth. Thou art our All in all, our only Lord.'

He is the Sustainer for He dispenses the fruit of actions. He is the Grandsire, that is, in whom the distinction of subject and object does not exist. He is the One whom the sages desire to know; the Purifier, clearing our mind from ignorance; the Om, the word-symbol of God; and the different branches of the Vedas—all is He. Further:

18. I am the Goal, the Supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Origin, the Dissolution, Resting Place, the Storehouse, and the Seed imperishable.

The Lord is the Goal, the object, the final result of all our labours and striving. As we have come from Him, so also shall we return unto Him. There is no higher goal. It is said in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, 'As from a blazing fire issue forth by thousands sparks of the same nature, even so, my good friend, various beings come forth from the imperishable Brahman and unto It they return again.'⁴

He is the Supporter; the Lord; the Witness of all that is done and not done; the Abode where all beings dwell; the Refuge, the shelter for the distressed, the place of safety

where no trouble can reach; the Friend who does good without expecting any return or acknowledgment; the Beginning; the End; the Resting Place of the whole world; and the Storehouse where all is preserved during *pralaya* as the seed for further harvest. He is the seed imperishable, the origin of all things.

References

1. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.8.
2. *Isaiah*, 45.5-7.
3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
4. *Mundaka*, 2.1.1.

Thinking is nothing but talking to oneself. If one does not converse with others, one surely talks with one's mind. There is no escape from talking. When you are engaged in conversation with someone, you will have to talk on various topics. But when you are alone, why should you waste your thoughts on useless matters? It is better to think of the Lord. In order to be established in the recollectedness of God, one needs to practise japa.

—Swami Turiyananda

A Visit to Europe

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Holland

We reached our Holland centre (Rama-krishna Vedanta Society) in the town of Amstelveen at 6 pm. This is a nice two-storeyed building with a small garden at the front and back. The ashrama is well kept and commands beautiful surroundings with a lot of greenery around. Swami Sarvatmananda is the minister-in-charge. A Dutch young man named Davū assists him.

After a night's rest, we woke up to a bright morning. At 9:30 am we left for Amsterdam central station by train. Amsterdam is the biggest city of the Netherlands. The city has many canals—they say that there are a hundred of them. We got into a tourist launch to see the city. We were five, including Sarvatmananda and Davū, leaving Bhogilal behind to cook lunch. He is a constant visitor to this centre. He comes over from England with his car and spends a few days now and then.

We went through many canals, all the time having a bird's-eye view — or rather a boat view — of Amsterdam. These canals save the city from flooding. We returned by train at 1:15 pm. After lunch and rest, we started off again to

see a dyke. Bhogilal promised to show us one. Most parts of the Netherlands are below sea level. So dykes are built all along the sea to prevent sea water from flooding the country. Bhogilal drove his car in different directions, but could not find a dyke. Evidently, he had missed the way! Anyway, he did find a dyke at last, a rather small one.

We hurriedly returned to the ashrama. I was to meet the devotees at 7 pm and give a talk on 'Vedanta for Modern Man'. After the talk, the question-answer session went on till 9:30 pm. There were about 30 people. Many Dutch people understand English, so no translation was needed.

Germany

Late in the evening, Devatmananda arrived from Gretz. He brought our luggage



A boat trip on Amsterdam's canals



At Amsterdam railway station

with him. Next morning he was to take us by car to Germany. We five were accommodated in two cars. In Europe the roads are excellent. One can go even at a speed of 140 to 150 kmph. We first went to Lily Chakravarty's house at Oberhausen. She is a German devotee and has her beautiful house in this village. She often spends many days at our Greta centre. She had cooked lunch for us. After lunch and rest, we started off towards Bindweide, a village where a Vedanta Society is run by devotees. By 4:45 pm we reached the place.

The German countryside is quite charming. In such peaceful surroundings the biggest war-machine

ever mounted set the whole world on a conflagration for five years! Man himself is creating his hell on this earth, whereas he could create his heaven also here!

When we reached Bindweide Society, there were only 4 or 5 devotees, for they had not expected us so soon. There were Mr Basu Mullick and his German wife; Mr Joshi, who

hails from Almora district in India; and Dietlind Koppman, a lady devotee who has translated into German the biographies of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda by Swami Nikhilananda.

This house is three-storeyed and is situ-



In front of the Bindweide ashrama

ated on the main road. There are fields all round with ripe golden wheat waiting to be harvested. The landscape around is picturesque. Such beautiful villages dot the way every few miles.

There is a meeting hall-cum-dining hall on the ground floor, besides the kitchen and one or two living rooms. On the first floor, there are many rooms, which can accommodate 15 or 16 persons. The shrine is situated on the top floor. There is also a big room meant for visiting swamis. All round the building there are flower beds. There is one more single-storeyed structure made of timber at one end.

There was evening prayer and meditation in the shrine. Even at 7:35 pm the sun was shining in all its glory! By now more devotees had arrived.

Next day, 26 June, there was meditation in the shrine at 6 am. Later we went for a walk with Swami Devatmananda. At 11 am I talked to the devotees and also answered questions on Vedanta till 12:45 pm.

After prayer and meditation in the evening, we had supper. Amit Banerjee, a young man whom I had known in Madras, came with his wife Sahana and their 3-month-old child. Sahana plays the sitar well. She had learnt it from her father Santosh Banerjee, a well-known sitarist. She gave a sitar recital. Amit accompanied her on the tabla. The performance lasted 1½ hours from 9 pm. It was quite good.

The next morning Devatmananda took us to Köln, also spelt Cologne, a city 80 km away, to show the famous cathedral there, nearly sixteen centuries old. Begun in the fourth century, additions have been made to it through the centuries. The construction of the entire cathedral was completed in the nineteenth century. It is a magnificent structure built in huge proportions. The highest spire is more than 300 feet. All in stone and adorned with Gothic arches and a vaulted dome and huge pillars, this cathedral is indeed impos-



The Köln cathedral

ing. From the cathedral, we went to see the Rhine River. This is one of the bigger rivers in Europe. Huge launches take tourists on long trips on the river. We returned to the ashrama for lunch.

In the afternoon, I had another question-answer session with devotees for 1½ hours. They had come from Frankfurt (which is 1½ hours away), Cologne and some other cities. I had another question-answer session for 1½ hours in the afternoon.

Some of the senior members like Mr Joshi, Mrs Basu Mallick and Ms Lily Chakraborty talked to me about the need for a swami in Germany, and requested me to send one. Germans are interested in Sanskrit and the Vedanta philosophy and thus Germany rightly deserves a regular centre of the Order. But for the



On the bank of the Rhine with Swami Devatmananda

the south of Switzerland on the roads leading to Italy.

Our ashrama here stands on a nice small plot of land in the heart of the city. Nevertheless, it is quiet. Lots of trees are there all around. In Geneva, you can erect buildings on only one-third of your plot. The remaining portion is for gardens and trees!

Second World War, a centre would have been started there 60 years ago!

Switzerland

On the 28th morning, we four (Bhogilal, Dr Suneeti Basu, Dr Gour Das and I) bade goodbye to Germany and started for Geneva, at 8:45 am. It was an 800-km drive to Geneva. Bhogilal was, of course, happy to drive. He had also stuffed the boot with various eatables: snacks, tea in a big flask, and lunch packets! Devatmananda left for France.

Except for the occasional drizzle, the weather was wonderful, the bright sun shining alike on the fields and crops, and the low hills carpeted with greenery. We reached Geneva at 7:45 pm. While entering Switzerland, there was no immigration or customs check. 'Schengen' countries—most of the countries who are members of the European Union—have abolished checking at entry points when one travels from one country to another. It is like travelling from one state to another in India. Once you are in Switzerland you pass through so many tunnels, some short, some long. The longest tunnels in the world are in

small country, Switzerland has three languages: French in the north, German in the east and north-east, and Italian in the south. It is charming mountain scenery all round. Geneva is on the eastern and southern bank of Lake Geneva, the biggest lake in Europe. Zurich is the biggest city, which is in the eastern, German-speaking area. Most people in Switzerland speak three languages. It is significant that Switzerland was not involved in the First and Second World Wars. A sort of gentleman's agreement has been there all along not to disturb Switzerland. Thus the Swiss franc, which is a hard currency, remains stable all the time.

On Sunday, 29 June, we left for Chamonix in two cars, one of Mr Sagnik Chattopadhyay and another of Bhogilal. Sagnik is an ex-student of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur. He is employed at the United Nations in Geneva. There were many tourists at Chamonix. We bought our tickets and went up by cable car to see Mont Blanc, the highest peak in Europe. The cable car takes us up to 12,500 feet. Mont Blanc is 16,000 feet high. It is a fantastic sight from the top. Mont Blanc is

pronounced in French as 'Mo Blān'. This part of the Alps is in France and so the French are justifiably proud that the highest peak in Europe is in France! The peak is snow-covered. Many people go snow-hiking. It is not very difficult once you know how to go about it—of course, provided you have the time and energy.

We returned to the ashrama by 3:15 pm. At 5:45 pm I gave a talk on 'Vedanta in Everyday Life'. There were about 30 devotees, mostly Indians.

Late in the evening, Dr Hossein of the World Health Organization took us—Dr Suneeti, Dr Gour Das and I—to show us some landmarks in Geneva. He took us to the International Labour Organization, where he works. It is a huge building. Dr Hossein is a Sri Lankan and has been in Switzerland for many years. He is a liberal Muslim, and is well acquainted with Vedanta and Hinduism.

Next morning Swami Amarananda, head of our Geneva centre, took us to Saas Fee, a charming village among the mountains. Bhogilal stayed back. Swami Vivekananda had visited this place and stayed here for two weeks (4-19 August 1896). We went by train to Brig, hours from Geneva. From there we went by bus. The train and bus services are excellent. We went into a church where nobody was there. Of course, it was noon time, and we couldn't expect anyone there at that time. Swamiji had perhaps visited *this* church (it is said that he offered some wild flowers at the feet

of Virgin Mary), for there is one more in the village.

Then we went up by cable car. These are small ones, accommodating only four persons. About ten of them go round and round automatically, now up, now down, one behind another. When a car comes to the platform, it halts for a few seconds, and then the passengers must hop in. It took us to a height of 7,800 feet. We reached a meadow at the foot of a hill. There was hardly anyone there. The scenery on all sides was breathtaking—so many peaks ranging from 11,000 feet to 15,000 feet, some snow-covered. The snow was melting fast and the water was falling into a river, which empties itself into the Geneva Lake. The River Rhone flows out of this lake.

The place was ideal for an outdoor, open-air lunch. We opened our lunch packets which Bhogilal had carefully provided for us. So it was like a picnic. After spending an hour or more here, we went down by cable car to Saas Fee again and took the bus to the railway station and boarded the train to Geneva. We returned by 7:15 pm to the ashrama.

Next morning, again, we four left for another part of the Alps. We took the train to



In front of Mont Blanc

Montreux from Geneva. From there we took the narrow-gauge train called Golden Pass Line Panoramic Express. The train goes deep into the mountains passing by a mountain or by a village in the midst of the forest. The scenery is captivating. This train takes us to many tourist spots in Interlaken, Lucerne and Zurich. Originally we had an intention of going up to Interlaken, a beauty spot, but found that we wouldn't have enough time to return to Geneva the same day. So we got down at Gstaad, where we boarded a bus that took us to a cable-car station located in a forest. The cable car takes us further up, from where Jungfrau, another prominent peak, and also a glacier could be seen. But the weather was not good that day, especially on the higher reaches and so the cable-car station did not operate. So we had a quick lunch and then turned back our

steps to Geneva. We were back at the ashrama by evening.

Dr Gour Das stayed back, as he wanted to return to India if he could get the date advanced in his ticket. He did get a ticket for 5 July.

On 2 July, at 9 am, we bade goodbye to Switzerland and took the road to France in Bhogilal's car. Bhogilal and Suneeti shared the driving. It is a pleasure to drive through such roads. There are all the simple facilities needed all along the way, every 5 km. Of course, we had to pay 35 francs for using the highway. There are cement benches and tables, toilets and so on—all in the midst of trees. We had carried our lunch and snacks, so it turned out to be a picnic. Paris is 537 km from Geneva.

(To be concluded)

And There Was Light!

A villager came to the big city for the first time in his life. He was amazed at the many wonders he saw there. He wanted to buy something to show to his friends back home. Most of the items needed electricity, which his village didn't have. He was delighted when he found a flashlight. He bought it and was fascinated every time he pressed the switch and a bright light came on.

As he continued on his way, he saw people waiting in line and learnt that they were waiting to enter a theatre to see a movie. He had no idea what a movie was, but decided to wait in line too. He paid for a ticket and was ushered into a dark room.

After a little while, a picture started playing. He was fascinated to see the beautiful scenery and all the action on the screen. Then he remembered the flashlight in his pocket: 'I will shine the flashlight on the picture, so I will see it even better.' He flashed the light on the screen, but to his amazement the picture became faded. From all sides people started shouting that he should turn off the light!

'But I only wanted to get a better view of the picture,' he said to the one sitting next to him. 'Don't you know? Here, we see only in the dark!' replied his neighbour.

It's the same with the theatre of this world. Many of the pleasures and values people pursue have value only because they find themselves in spiritual darkness. When they bring spiritual light into their lives, these values and pleasures fade, for they are only imaginary and temporary.

—From cyberspace

Aspects of Holy Mother

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

Three aspects of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi surprise postmodernists: her illiteracy, her ignorance of scientific things and her simple, rustic appearance. Holy Mother is considered the ideal of the present and future ages. She is said to represent the ideal and glory of perfect womanhood in particular and of the ideal of motherhood in general. Yet in a few aspects like those mentioned above, she appears to be different from the present and future generations of women. We are not going to discuss here her traits like purity, character and spirituality, but shall concentrate only on her secular education and simplicity.

Holy Mother and Education

One of the surprising aspects of Holy Mother is her so-called lack of secular learning. She did not have the basics of schooling. With some effort, she could just manage to read. But she could not write.¹ If at all, she is said to have written *ma* in Bengali once—that is all. How could she be the ideal of the ultra-modern woman then? Or is the ideal of the future woman such rural simplicity and lack of secular knowledge? Perhaps not. Considering the present information revolution, the way education is spreading everywhere and the fact that women's education is gaining tremendous boost the world over, it is rather surprising that the ideal of future womanhood herself should have been virtually illiterate.

Several reasons are put forth for Holy Mother's illiteracy. One, she strove to learn but was dissuaded by ignorant relatives. However, she stealthily learnt the Bengali alphabet initially and, later, learnt to read from a little girl. (30) This urge to learn is presented as the urge of the modern woman to learn. Two,

the reason why women of modern times should be educated is because the ideal of the modern age, Holy Mother, suffered so much and showed how learning could help in certain situations of life. Three, her own desire to learn being unfulfilled, and because of her awareness that learning is vital to life, Holy Mother initiated several institutions like the Nivedita School and the school at Badanganj, near her village, so that women could learn. Four, Holy Mother need not have to learn because she is Sarasvati herself, the goddess of learning. Five, her lack of learning and her innocence appear as a sweet sport of the Divine Mother for the devotee.

These are good reasons and may appeal to devotees and admirers. But as an ideal, it is a different matter. Devotees may accept the ideal as it is, for they know. For the modern and future generations to accept this ideal, however, we should present reasons. Moreover, it is not that she should be selectively accepted. An ideal is an ideal. Therefore the modern woman—computer savvy, learned, English-speaking, cellphone-waving, vehicle-driving, college-educated—and Holy Mother, an innocent villager, cannot perhaps go together. Is Holy Mother outdated then? How should one reconcile her lack of learning with her being the ideal of the future woman?

The above five reasons apart, there are also two methods of reconciliation: the 'computer method' and the 'philosophy method'.

Computer Method: Time was when people thought knowledge of typing was indispensable for learning computers. However, with the advent of voice mail, the recorder and so on, we can imagine future generations seeing our keyboards in museums. They may wonder that to express our thoughts we ancients

used fingers. So there is no harm if one does not know typing now. But what about writing? Like typing, writing on paper with pen or pencil, too, could become obsolete. It is true that the time is imminent when computers will replace exercise books and white sheets. How many literate and working people use pen and paper now as they did before? Even personal signatures are going digital. Already we hear of schools in several countries using computers to train even kindergarten children. So writing is not absolutely needed now. We don't know what the Silicon Valley has in store for us for the future. Therefore Holy Mother was ahead of her times in not being able to write, but able to communicate verbally, and through thought. Language, as we know, was not a barrier for her to express herself or to understand her disciples and admirers from different regions of India and abroad. Regarding language, we shall speak presently.

Philosophy Method: Post-structuralism is the latest trend in Western philosophy. Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and others are the pioneers in this field. Most of them are French, Derrida being the most famous of them; he has made major contributions in the field of post-structuralism and deconstruction.

Structuralism was the hope of philosophy, language, anthropology, literature and so on, because they all sought a scientific ground or a rational basis for their existence. Structuralism was developed in order to seek meaning or the common ground of things. According to the dictionary, structuralism is a theory 'that considers any text as a structure whose various parts only have meaning when they are considered in relation to each other'. That is, when we read various things in a book, we seek their central meaning. Derrida argued against structuralism. He says that when we believe in structuralism, we believe in what the text *ought* to mean rather than what it *actually* means. That is, we are pre-con-

ditioned. So his theory was deconstructivism, based on Martin Heidegger's *Destruktion*. Derrida argued that whenever you think of structuralism, you seek the centre of something, which is wrong. By seeking the centre, we ignore the other things; we sideline the binary opposites. He was for the ignored things rather than the central figure put on the pedestal. Generally understood, deconstruction, then, is reading things without seeking the centre or the rock bottom or the foundation; it is giving importance to the sidelined things too.

In 1966, Derrida gave a lecture at Johns Hopkins University, USA, that became revolutionary according to Jim Powell (*Derrida for Beginners*). Here, Derrida showed that the whole of Western philosophy is dependent on this theory of structuralism. How is that? Derrida said that because the God of Christianity was centralized by all post-Greek philosophers, certain other things were excluded. What were the things excluded? God, according to Christianity, is the Word, Logos. 'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Derrida calls the Word or God the 'Transcendental Signified'. 'Signified' and 'signifier' are two terms commonly used in Derrida literature. We have their equivalents in *rūpa* (form) and *nāma* (name), respectively. The signified is form, like cow-ness, while the signifier is the name given to it. The real cow is the referent. So God is the Transcendental Signified. The popular (transcendental) signifiers are Truth, God, supreme Spirit and so on. These are names but they don't fully describe It or God. Yet Western philosophers have depended on them, which have become central to philosophy. When it comes to God, we cannot have a referent. So He or It is transcendental. So He or It is called the Transcendental Signified. This is like Vedanta: according to Vedanta, God is the innermost experience of the soul. What God is cannot be explained.

Derrida argues that the Transcendental

Signified cannot have a signifier or *nāma*. Can words express Him or It? Even Vedanta asks the same question. He is beyond everything. His best expression is Logos or the Word. God expressed Himself through the Word. That became the Son. It is like speech, where one expresses one's self directly. Somewhat speaking in the language of the Indian Sphota theory, where there are the four stages of speech (*parā*, *pāśyanti*, *madhyamā* and *vaikhari*), Derrida says that when we speak, we speak our soul out. That is, the innermost self is speaking itself—*parā* becomes *vaikhari*. There is the presence of the speaker in speech. Writing, however, is different. A person may write something and die. So there is absence. Speech is soul poured out in presence, whereas writing signifies absence. Writing, according to Derrida, is 'less immediate'. It is corruption. It is said that Socrates too spoke of writing being secondary to speech. Derrida says that when writing was developed the word or speech was ignored. Writing became central, and speech was sidelined.

There was a time when things were natural. We did not know how to write. We were pure then. We heard truths from the lips of experienced elders. There was presence then, not absence. Nowadays a person need not have any experience but may write. So it is not the soul speaking. Once we began to write we became corrupt, says Derrida. His *On Grammatology*, according to Jim Powell, is a classic which argues in favour of speech. Modern philosophers are fast accepting Derrida's view that speech is natural and has the personal touch, while writing is formal.

We have used this to show that even from the philosophical point of view, Holy Mother was extremely modern because she considered speech as better than writing. One may say she did not know how to write. Yes, but suppose Holy Mother really had wished to learn the art of writing. Who could have stopped her? Yet she did not learn the art of writing. She spoke. And that transformed ev-

eryone. Therefore Holy Mother is ultramodern and a perfect ideal for the future woman. Then again, we believe the Satya Yuga has begun with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. Perhaps, in order to be in tune with that age, the ideals of the age (and of future ages)—Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi—chose to remain illiterate, as it were. Calligraphy and the art of writing are comparatively recent. Our sages transmitted knowledge verbally, and that has in fact came down *intact*. Can we say the Vedic sages were ignorant? They knew far better than all of us put together.

Holy Mother and Technology

In the modern world of gadgets and the Internet, Holy Mother belongs nowhere, so it would seem. She appears outmoded and in no way linked to our technological world. She did not know that air trapped in a water pipe made the tap hiss; she did not know how to wind a clock; she did not know anything about science. She was scared to ride in a car. Yet she has to be the ideal. How can this be possible?

The answer to this puzzle is simple: Even Newton and Einstein, the pioneers of modern scientific development, would look quite unscientific, when placed in present circumstances. They knew less than today's schoolboy does, because the schoolboy is computer savvy, while the computer is a strange thing for them. They are out of date.

But the point is, the scientific spirit shows in the way of thinking and not in the lifestyle. One may be perfectly unscientific amid all the gadgets in the world, and a rustic could be scientific in the absence of such gadgets. One may be a professional scientist and yet be perfectly unscientific in thinking. As a matter of fact, even in this so-called age of science most people think in a surprisingly primitive way. Really, are we rational? Are we open to newer ideas? Are we unbiased? Are we ready to give up our pet notions when new truths are revealed, or do we raise impregnable walls

against new ideas? That is the test. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi passes the test admirably. Though she came with a purpose, she never imposed her ideas on anyone.

Another thing that appears unscientific in Holy Mother is her faith in strange remedies, in which modern people do not trust, for example the clay of the Simhavahini temple. In 1875, when Holy Mother was twenty-two years old, she had a severe attack of dysentery. While she was suffering intensely, the village goddess Simhavahini suggested the cure to her mother Shyamasundari, which relieved her of her suffering. (55-6) Since then Holy Mother believed in the clay of the precincts of the Simhavahini temple. That became a regular medicine.

The second treatment was not her invention, but was a local practice that she too abided by. When someone had malaria, the only medicine the villagers of those parts knew was to heat an iron rod and apply it on the region over the spleen. The singeing, they believed, would cure people of malaria. Even Ramakrishna underwent this treatment. But unlike others, Holy Mother did not wish to be tied or held down by others; she had such control over herself that she simply lay down and endured the torture.

How does one explain such strange beliefs? We shall not discuss the second cure, as Holy Mother must have been a helpless victim of her circumstances. But regarding the first, Mother's trust in the Simhavahini clay, it is perfectly scientific. The question here is of faith. Says Swami Vivekananda:

It is not the sign of a candid and scientific mind to throw overboard anything without proper investigation. Surface scientists, unable to explain the various extraordinary mental phenomena, strive to ignore their very existence. They are, therefore, more culpable than those who think that their prayers are answered by a being, or beings, above the clouds, or than those who believe that their petitions will make such beings change the course of the universe. The latter have the excuse of ignorance. ... The for-

mer have no such excuse.²

Moreover, faith heals better than any drug. And there is a God who looks into our affairs all the time.

There was a time when the medical world pooh-poohed prayer and faith as factors in healing. Several years ago *Reader's Digest* published an article from an official medical journal, saying that prayers are as effective as medicines in curing diseases. The thing in itself, like medicine, is of some importance, true; but of greater importance is the mindset receiving the thing. Holy Mother came to instil faith in human beings. Not that we should believe in spooks and hobgoblins, but the great quality of simple faith has been destroyed in the name of science. All of Ramakrishna's and Holy Mother's work was centred around restoring that faith once again in human minds. Faith can achieve anything.

Nowadays there is a rush to the Simhavahini temple, from where people take a little clay hoping to cure ailments. During Holy Mother's time, there were no other means in that remote village. But whenever doctors were available, Holy Mother resorted to them with full faith.

Holy Mother's Simplicity

These days appearance is everything. What you *are* may be different; but what you seem is vital. All that glitters *is* gold. That is why our postmodern world needs ideals like movie stars, who glitter and shine, and that is why the true and the genuine suffer.

Holy Mother can in no way come near such modern-day ideals. Far, far from them. If one looks at her photographs, one sees her attired in a cheap, simple, white sari. All her jewels are a pair of bangles—perfectly old-fashioned. In only three photographs we see her seated on a chair. In all the rest, she is her simple self. She definitely knew she would be worshipped for all time to come, yet she did not care for external glitter. So Holy Mother is not appealing in that sense of the word. Can

such a simple woman appeal to the glittering present and future ages?

Suppose some modern people do not find much appeal in Holy Mother. That is perfectly all right. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, the Divine Mother does not want the play to end. She wishes that it should continue. If all the players touch the granny in the play of hide-and-seek, the play will end. That the Divine Mother does not want. So she hides herself. If the children want the glitter, let them go for it. Let them play with the toys of the world. When they get tired, they will cry for Mother. And Mother is, of course, always there for those who want her.

The second reason why Holy Mother appears so simple is that she is the ideal and har-binger of the future. And surprisingly enough, the future will be nothing but the glorious past of India, only even more glorious. Says Swami-ji:

Many times have I been told that looking into the past only degenerates and leads to nothing, and that we should look to the future. That is true. But out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was. Our ancestors were great. We must first recall that. (3.285-6)

We move in circles, not straight lines. The future will most certainly take us back to the simplicity of the past. Swamiji says:

On one side, new India is saying, 'If we only adopt Western ideas, Western language, Western food, Western dress, and Western manners, we shall be as strong and powerful as the Western nations'; on the other, old India is saying, 'Fools! By imitation, others' ideas never become one's own; nothing, unless earned, is your own. Does the ass in the lion's skin become the lion?' (4.477)

Originality will be the watchword of the future, and Holy Mother is a best example of that. Further, purity is the greatest ornament, and that was what Holy Mother came to dem-

onstrate. We should quote Swamiji again because he is eloquent in the praise of Sita:

Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. ... [She was] purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God she must always remain. And every one of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish for ever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of Sita present. Mark my words: Sita has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman; we are all children of Sita. Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sita, is immediately a failure, as we see every day. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way. (3.256)

Just replace the word Sita with Sarada and re-read the above lines, for both were one.

Tired of the glamour of the past century, the world is slowly reverting to natural ways of life. The old simplicity and naturalness is becoming the ideal once more. Everywhere we hear of ecology, nature cure, alternative lifestyles and so on. This trend is bound to continue. Holy Mother came to show that through her life. This does not mean technology will go. It will remain. But life on earth itself will become simple—for our own survival. The naturalness and simplicity of Holy Mother's life indeed give us a foretaste of things to come.

*

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The Personality of Swami Vivekananda as Revealed through His Letters

DUSHYANTA PANDYA

Nothing reveals the varied aspects of the multifaceted personality of Swami Vivekananda as his letters. That is quite natural, because when one starts writing a letter, particularly to persons one loves, one casts off all sheaths of formality, behind which one's true nature lies hidden. Even as it is, Swamiji had hardly anything to hide and, what is more, he could hardly hide anything.

The first four volumes of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* do not contain any letters. Volumes 5, 6, 7 and 8 contain 123, 168, 53 and 197 letters. Thanks to the arduous labours of Marie Louise Burke and a few other devotees, we get 227 more letters in Volume 9, thus making a total of 768 letters. There might still be more, undiscovered or lost. The fortunate recipients of these letters number ninety-one.

Broadly speaking, the letters may be said to fall into two categories, formal and informal, although it becomes difficult at times to draw a clear line between the two, the reason for the disappearance of the demarcating line being the lack of formality in Swamiji's mental make-up.

The recipients of Swamiji's letters are maharajas, dewans, erudite scholars, learned professors, his gurubhais, disciples and his American and British well-wishers.

Swamiji has written his letters in Bengali (his mother tongue), English, Sanskrit and even in French. Most of the letters were written by Swamiji himself. A few of them, he might have dictated to his stenographer Goodwin.

The bug of wanderlust had bitten Swamiji, and our tradition also prescribes a wan-

dering life to a monk—*sadhu chalta bhala* ('a monk be better moving'), as the Hindi saying goes. Unfortunately, Swamiji could not leave his home soon after his guru's mahasamadhi. At the earliest opportunity, however, he set out from the Baranagore Math. Because of circumstances beyond his control, he had to return twice. He left the Math a third time, bidding goodbye to his gurubhais and almost ordering them not to accompany or follow him.

His Formality Was Just a Thin Veneer

Swamiji's letter writing started since his wandering began in 1888. His letters to Babu Pramadas Mitra and Balaram Bose are a bit formal, showing his deep respect for the scholarship of the one and the benignity of the other. Other letters, like those to the maharajas and Haridas Desai, the Dewan of Junagadh, also are a bit formal. But the veil of formality is quite thin.

Swamiji's first letter from America is addressed to Alasinga Perumal.¹ (There are forty-three letters addressed to him.) It is a very revealing one. After Swamiji's landing on American soil and reaching Chicago in early July, too early for the Parliament of Religions to start, though too late for registration as a delegate, and after going to Boston—this letter to his dear householder disciple hides more than it reveals. Written from Breezy Meadows near Boston, Massachusetts, on 20 August 1893, it states in clear language the financial strait Swamiji was in as well as the stark necessity of buying woollen clothes! Even so, Swamiji makes no direct mention of his failure to get admission to the Parliament of Religions. He gives a hint, however: 'I do not know

whether I shall go back to Chicago or not.' (5.18)

The letter also displays Swamiji's sense of humour, and that too at his own cost, when he mentions the 'advantage in living with [a lady], in saving for some time my expenditure of £1 per day, and she has the advantage of inviting her friends over here and showing them a curio from India!' (5.12) Beneath this cloak of humour, Swamiji is hiding all his anxieties, uncertainties, and maybe some frustration also.

Reaction to His Chicago Address

The very next letter to Alasinga written from Chicago on 2 November 1893 begins with Swamiji's expression of sorrow 'that a moment's weakness on my part should cause you so much trouble'. (5.19) Instead of telling him of his success at the Parliament, Swamiji admits, 'And I, who never spoke in public in my life, to address this august assemblage!! ... my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up; I was so nervous and could not venture to speak in the morning.' (5.20) The letter naturally exudes delight and runs into five and a half printed pages, mentions the names of the other delegates from India, the way he began by bowing down to Devi Sarasvati, and the way he addressed the august assembly. At the end of the short speech, had sat down almost exhausted with emotion. (5.20-1)

Among other things, Swamiji mentions how his addresses were received at the Parliament and by the newspapers, and his plans to stay in America or go to England. Though he mentions his success, he does not point out the great publicity he received. His prophetic utterance made before his gurubhais Brahmananda and Turiyananda at the Abu Road railway station that 'the Parliament of Religions was willed by God to prepare his success',²

had proved to be true.

Although Swamiji sends the gift of a phonograph—then a novelty—to Alasinga, he advises him to 'go to work for the organisation.'³ Swamiji pours his wrath on a Bengali biography of Sri Ramakrishna, alluding to the use of the type of language Sri Ramakrishna had never used. (5.53)

Unfolding of Swamiji's Mission

More than a year later Swamiji mentions to his 'Blessed and Beloved' Alasinga (5.55) the attacks made by the missionaries (5.36) and his utterly detached attitude to them, despite the virulence of some of them. In his letter of 12 January 1895, Swamiji emphasizes the need of 'an organisation that will teach the

When one starts writing a letter, particularly to persons one loves, one casts off all sheaths of formality, behind which one's true nature lies hidden. Even as it is, Swamiji had hardly anything to hide and, what is more, he could hardly hide anything.

Hindus mutual help and appreciation'. (5.67) Swamiji's plan has undergone a change and he wants 'a band of fiery young men'. (5.35) He declares boldly, 'I have a message to give, let me give it to the people who appreciate it and who will work it out.' (5.67)

These few quotations show very clearly Swamiji's mental make-up taking shape, and the emergence of a clear concept of the mission of his life.

From Formality to Informality

Swamiji's letters to Sister Nivedita show a rise from a formal address, 'Dear Miss Noble', (6.398) to an endearing one, 'My dear Nivedita'. (6.423) This transformation is not sudden though. The first letter was penned in

London and is dated 7 June 1896, while the last one, the forty-eighth, was written from Benares Cantonment on 4 March 1902, wherein Swamiji uses a still more endearing term, 'My dear Margo'. (9.180) This transformation speaks volumes for Swamiji and Sister Nivedita. Swamiji was a friend, philosopher and guide to the young Irish lady with an inquisitive mind and the willingness to adjust to the flies and mosquitoes, the dirt and squalor, the rigid orthodoxy and closed mind of Indian society. Miss Margaret Noble had the nobility to accept and to adjust, remain firm like a rock, and the mental make-up to accept Swamiji as her guru, as her guiding star, and to accept India with a fervour so strong as would put many a patriot to shame.

Just as the ordinary fisherman Peter left his boat behind and walked after Christ, Nivedita also left her home and country, the comforts of life and the companionship of her own people, her near and dear ones, at the call of Swamiji. The similarity does not stop here. A couple of days before his death—it was an Ekadashi day—Swamiji invited Nivedita to have a special meal with him. At the end of the meal, he washed her hands and wiped them with his napkin, just as Jesus Christ had done at the time of his last supper with his disciples. For Nivedita also it turned out to be the last meal with her master. We may well call it the zenith of the spiritual relationship between the two.

Swamiji's letters to Nivedita reflect all hues of the rainbow—affection, warning, guidance, blessings, education, showing the spiritual path.

Christine and Nivedita

Sometime after the Parliament of Religions was over, Swamiji had first been to Minneapolis, situated to the west of Chicago, and from there to Memphis, and then moved eastward to Detroit. The spiritual rays emanating from his luminous mind touched the receptive soul of Sister Christine and she laid all her

soul's devotion at his feet. She became the recipient of his blessings, guidance, affection and encouragement, as is evident from the seventy-one letters addressed to her, most of which were unearthed by Marie Louise Burke and presented in Volume 9 of the *Complete Works* (see 9.573). Swamiji's letters to this shy and self-effacing young lady reveal his paternal affection and loving care for her. Christine does not have Nivedita's assertive vigour or patriotic fervour for India, but she has a heart dedicated to the cause pointed out to her by her guru. Swamiji's magnetic pen pulls her out of the dark clouds of doubt and reticence, lights her spiritual path, and he also provides her with financial assistance. (9.174) His first letter to her is dated 9 August 1895 and the last, 21 June 1902, just a few days before his departure from the world.

Both Nivedita and Christine were like twigs of spiritual *arāṇi* wood, ready to ignite at the touch of a flaming word from Swamiji.

His Relationship with the Hale Family

Swamiji had a very special relationship with the Hales of 541 Dearborn Avenue, Chicago. Mrs George W Hale had shown great kindness to Swamiji when he had lost his way on his return from Boston to Chicago to attend the Parliament. His first letter to her is dated 21 November 1893 and is written from Minneapolis. All the fifty-seven letters addressed to Mrs Hale are full of a son's affection for his mother. He always addressed her as 'Mother' or 'Mother Church'; naturally, because she had provided shelter to the tired and haggard-looking Swamiji on his return from Boston to Chicago, made him feel at home, given him something to eat, and had guided him to the Parliament. How could a person of Swamiji's sensitivity forget this? For a pretty long period, all mail from India first went to Chicago and was then redirected to the ever-moving Swamiji.

The entire family was attached to Swamiji as can be seen from his letters to the Hale sis-

ters, three addressed jointly to Harriet and Mary, and forty-four written to only Mary. His letters to Mary are sometimes full of fun and frolic, like letters from an elder brother to his teenage sister.

In one of his letters to Mrs Hale Swamiji pokes fun at Senator Palmer by spelling his name 'Ssenator Ppalmer', thus indicating the Senator's stammer. (9.13) One of his letters to the Hale sisters—'Dear Babies' (8.301)—is full of fun and frolic. One sentence at least may be quoted here: 'Oh! how nice and cool it is here, and it is increased a hundredfold when I think about the gasping, sizzling, boiling, frying four old maids, and how cool and nice I am here. Whooooo!' (8.317) The entire letter is full of contagious light-heartedness and points to one of the best periods in his life. The exhaustion caused by irregularity in life and lack of proper diet, constant moving around and constant lecturing, receiving an incessant chain of visitors, and illness, as this letter indicates, are far away. So full of mirth and verve, the letter is aglow with the joy overflowing Swamiji's heart.

The closeness of relationship between Swamiji and Mary Hale is brought out very markedly in their correspondence in verse. (8.162-7) It is quite interesting to note that Mary could take the liberty of telling Swamiji: 'In thought and word he could well beat her, / What bothered him though was the metre.' (8.164) Another example of this closeness is found in the letters written from England on Swamiji's first visit to the country in 1896. He writes to the Hale sisters on 14 April of the year from New York that he is sailing on the next day at noon. (8.376) And within six days, on 20 April, he sends 'Greetings to you from the other shore.' (8.377)

Other Letters

The letters to Pramadadas Mitra do not seem to indicate any previous acquaintance between the two. So also is the case with the Maharaja of Khetri, his minister, the Thakor-

saheb of Limbdi, Dewan Haridas Desai, Alasinga and other Madras devotees, and others whom Swamiji met during his wanderings in India. However, his closeness to his gurubhais does not need elaboration. Six of them received letters and each letter bears its own individual mark, and many others are written to the whole band of them. In all, these letters make a total of about 100.

Guiding the Fledgling Ramakrishna Order

Before his departure to America, Swamiji had written three letters to Swami Akhandananda (6.224, 233, 234), one to Swami Abhedananda (6.237) and two to Swami Saradananda (6.242, 9.6)—all written in 1890. Since he wanted to be left alone, he then cut himself off completely from them and there was raised a wall of silence, so solid and strong that Swamiji did not share his success at the Parliament of Religions with his gurubhais. This period of total unconcern, as it were, lasted for almost four years and Swamiji writes to Swami Ramakrishnananda from Chicago on 19 March 1894, confessing, 'I have not written to you since coming to this country.' (6.250) The letter contains information about the cold climate: 'Everything is frozen stiff—even an elephant can walk on rivers and canals and lakes. The massive Falls of Niagara, of such tremendous velocity, are frozen to marble!!' (6.251) He emphasizes this by writing in a jocular vein: 'I was mortally afraid that my nose and ears would fall off, but to this day they are all right.' (6.251)

The letter is a mine of information about many aspects of American life, the high cost of living, the comfortably heated houses, the Americans being adept 'in art and appliances, foremost in enjoyment and luxury, foremost in making money, and foremost in spending it'. (6.251) Swamiji makes a clear mention of the change in Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar from being 'very cordial at first' to the growth of a 'canker in his mind!' (6.252)

Swamiji describes his experience on the

rock facing Mother Kanyakumari's temple and hints at his plans for the revival of India, telling his gurubhai that 'in view of all this, specially of the poverty and ignorance, I had no sleep.' (6.253-4) It does not seem strange, however, that Swamiji makes no reference to his thumping success at the Parliament of Religions six months ago. This shows very distinctly the equanimity of his mind. Swamiji remained the same in gain or loss, in victory or defeat! Running into six pages, this long letter reveals various aspects of Swamiji's great personality, his power of narration, the purity of his heart, his affection for his gurubhais, his desire to share with them the joys and sorrows he felt in that foreign country, his ability to adjust, and even his sense of humour.

We come across his first letter addressed to all his gurubhais, 'Dear Brothers', probably written in August 1894. The very first sentence of the letter says, 'Before this I wrote to you a letter which for want of time was very incomplete.' (6.263) Unfortunately, the letter has not seen the light of day so far. This particular letter reveals Swamiji in the role his guru asked him to play, the role of guiding his gurubhais. The *kshatra* blood in Swamiji's veins has welled up, as the letter indicates. He pours forth his indignation on the emphasis given to rituals, the false sense of compassion, and indicates certain things to follow which he exhorts his gurubhais. (6.263-7) The light humour we have noticed in the letters mentioned earlier gives place to devastating satire.

Out of the total of about 100 letters that Swamiji wrote to his gurubhais jointly and severally, Volume 6 of the *Complete Works* contains about forty. Letters 45 and 56 are without any specific date—'1894' is all that is there. The address is also not stated and the letters are similar in nature in that both lay down guidelines for the gurubhais. In letter 56 Swamiji advises them to educate the masses. (6.289-90) He quotes the *Katha Upanishad*, so close to his heart, and asserts that 'he who is Ramakrishna's child does not seek his per-

sonal good.' (6.294) Swamiji also describes life in summer of that 'very funny country'. (6.290)

In a letter in Volume 6 we also come across that great Upanishadic mantra exhorting us to treat our mothers, fathers, teachers and guests as gods, extended so graciously to include 'the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted'. (6.288) Salvation of the self is not emphasized, but rather the welfare of the world. In Khetri Swami Akhandananda had prevailed on the Maharaja to provide schooling for the young slaves who worked at the palace and also undertaken some measures to serve the poor. Swamiji's expansion of the Upanishadic mantra was to become the seed that sprouted in 1897 and grew into the *kabir vaad* of the Ramakrishna Mission today, rushing to serve the stricken everywhere.

Letters to his great gurubhai Rakhai (Swami Brahmananda) number about thirty-five. In a letter to Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) written in the beginning (?) of 1895, Swamiji emphatically tells him to 'Take great care of them [Rakhai and Hari]. ... Never forget that Rakhai was the special object of Shri Ramakrishna's love.' (6.332) This is a ten-page letter offering detailed instructions and practical hints regarding organizational work. Similarly, in a letter to Swami Akhandananda Swamiji is all praise for the famine-related work undertaken by Akhandananda (6.400), although in a letter to Swami Shuddhananda Swamiji expresses his dissatisfaction at the way the work was being done: '... but the system is not good. It seems they are frittering away their energies in one little village and that only doling out rice.' (7.507) He also wanted some preaching work to be done and some educational work to be undertaken. He does not like to hear that 'only so many *beggars are helped!*' (7.508) The same Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda on another occasion, 'I give you a bit of my mind; don't be angry, pray. I am your slave so long as you are his [Sri Ramakrishna's]—step a hair's breadth out-

side that, and you and I are on a par.' (6.346) Swamiji's letter of 24 February 1902 to Swami Brahmananda is a small note of acknowledgement, but his displeasure at the lack of communication and delay in writing is evident. (5.178)

On another occasion, though, Swamiji controls himself and quietly turns down Swami Brahmananda's suggestion to him to return to India. (6.340) In the same letter he brushes aside Swami Shivananda's proposal to go abroad and thus pours cold water on the latter's eagerness. Instead Swamiji wants his gurubhais to open more centres in India. And after saying all this, he gives them full freedom by stating, 'However, I have nothing to say against any particular course which anyone may be led to adopt.' (6.341) This, probably, appears to have been written to express his disapproval of the various points Swami Brahmananda might have mentioned in his letter to Swamiji. At least Swamiji does not seem to be satisfied with the type and pace of work that was being done in India, while he was working very hard in the West. His letter of 27 April 1896, written from England to his gurubhais, runs into seven pages and gives, as it were, an outline of activities and schedule the organization should follow. (7.491) It lays down rules and regulations to be followed by the inmates of the Alambazar Math and throws a flood of light on Swamiji's power of organization. Even small details like receiving visitors and smoking have not escaped his attention.

To Pramadas Mitra

The very first letter of Swamiji's in Volume 6 is addressed to Pramadas Mitra. (6.201) It appears to be the first one he wrote after starting his wandering life. The letter is quite formal and exhibits Swamiji's regard for Pramadas Mitra. In another letter, written a year later after returning to Calcutta, we see the respect Swamiji bore for the gentleman: 'Words fail to describe how strong is the de-

sire in my mind to go to Varanasi and have my soul blessed by meeting you and sojourning with you in good converse' (6.206) Swamiji also expresses his indebtedness to Pramadas Mitra for his advice, 'which comes from you as the outcome of your experience and spiritual practice'. (6.206) Swamiji's confession of the prevalence of rajas in him owing to his living in and around Calcutta is a clear pointer to his confidence in and respect for Pramadas Mitra. In his letter of 17 August 1889, Swamiji refers to Pramadas Mitra's correction of a wrong idea of his with respect to some philosophical and sociological questions, and poses the latter a dozen more questions. (6.209-14) We again see Swamiji according this kind of respect to Pramadas Mitra in his letter dated 26 May 1890, seeking his guidance and help in buying land to raise a memorial to his master Sri Ramakrishna. (6.239-42) The letter is quite apologetic in tone. As Swamiji's letter of 4 June 1890 suggests, Pramadas Mitra appears to have said in the matter of the memorial that God's will would prevail; he himself does not seem to have offered any help. (8.285)

Then comes a long period of silence, a period of almost seven years. Meanwhile, Swamiji has wandered throughout the length and breadth of India and seen the squalor and ignorance, the oppression of the masses, the rigid orthodoxy and total unwillingness of the priestly class to learn anything new and adapt to the times, the injustice being perpetuated on the untouchables and the downtrodden, the vanity and pomp of the princes and their neglect of their subjects, the educated class becoming rootless under the influence of Christian missionaries and Western education. He has been to the Chicago Parliament of Religions and achieved thumping success there and has given his energizing and invigorating interpretation of the Hindu religion. But these things did not appear to have met with the approval of the great scholar Pramadas Mitra, who was chained by the shackles of meaning-

less orthodoxy.

After his triumphant return, Swamiji writes to him from Almora on 30 May 1897. (6.392) Swamiji's pen takes the form of a sharp, flaming rapier and cuts and thrusts at the scholar's various orthodox beliefs. Calling the likes of Shankara and Ramanuja 'mere Pundits with much narrowness of heart', he extols traditionally acknowledged incarnations like Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir as 'the true Avatars, for they had their hearts broad as the sky', and places Sri Ramakrishna 'above all'. (6.394) This surely must have sounded like the fall of the Bastille to Pramadas Mitra. Although the letter may not have succeeded in changing his orthodox outlook, Swamiji appears to have silenced him.

To Josephine MacLeod

Miss Josephine MacLeod received forty-three letters from Swamiji, the first written in June 1895 and the last on 15 May 1902. It appears from the very first letter addressed to 'Dear Joe' (8.338), and from the charming, racy style of the letters, revealing Swamiji's heart, that a close personal bond had already been established between the two. His last letter to her, written from the newly established Belur Math also sounds quite informal. (5.179)

Volume 9 contains two interesting letters which reveal Swamiji in an entirely different light. The detailed accounts (down to the last pie!) accompanying both the letters show how careful and scrupulous Swamiji was with somebody else's money. (9.105-6, 177-8)

A Personal Request to Khetri Maharaja

The fourteen letters written to the Maharaja of Khetri present new dimensions of Swamiji's personality. The Maharaja had wholeheartedly helped Swamiji in his visit to the Parliament of Religions in 1893. The Maharaja had the highest regard for Swamiji, whom he considered his benefactor and guru, and was ready to do anything at his bidding. Swamiji's two letters to him, written from Belur Math on

22 November and 1 December 1898 are very revealing. (9.108, 110)

After three and a half years of hectic work in the West, Swamiji had returned to India with his health completely shattered. He was accompanied by the Seviars, who helped him start the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the Himalayas. While in the West, Swamiji had sent some money for the *Brahmavadin* and for the Math. As a sannyasin he would not touch a pie of Math funds, and he was ailing and fast deteriorating. Swamiji confides to the Maharaja, 'I approach your Highness today on a most important business of mine, knowing well that I have not the least shame in opening my mind to you, and that I consider you as my *only friend* in this life.' (9.108) What was that most important business? Swamiji says, 'I have one great sin rankling always in my breast ... I have sadly neglected my mother.' (9.109) Now his last desire was 'to make Sevā and serve my mother She lives now in a hovel. I want to build a little, decent home for her' (9.109) Swamiji appeals to the Maharaja by addressing him as 'a royal descendent of Ramchandra' (9.109) and clarifies that 'The money I got from Europe was for the "work", and every penny almost has been given over to that work. ... I am tired, heart-sick and dying. Do, I pray, this last great work of kindness to me, befitting your great and generous nature' (9.109) Swamiji adds in the postscript, 'This is strictly private.' (9.109)

As desired by Swamiji's letter, the kind Maharaja sends a telegram expressing his readiness to help. The opening lines of Swamiji's next letter to the Maharaja, written nine days after, on 1 December, convey his gladness: 'Your telegram has pleased me beyond description.' (9.110) Swamiji then states the approximate cost of 'a little home in Calcutta' (9.110) and the amount needed to support his mother—one hundred rupees a month. Swamiji also mentions his own personal need of one hundred rupees per month owing to his failing health. (9.110)

It might seem strange that a sannyasin who has severed all worldly ties should beg for help for his mother. Buddha left his wife and child while they were asleep, left his palace and kingdom and went out in search of Truth. He attained enlightenment, made disciples, spread his message far and wide, and then one day returned to Kapilavastu. Damodardas Botadkar, a Gujarati poet, describes the meeting between Buddha and Yashodhara: Yashodhara just stands perplexed, not knowing how to address the great pathfinder who was once her beloved husband. Buddha approaches her and says, 'The one who loves the world loves you too.' Are we not seeing something similar in Swamiji too?

To His Friend Sturdy

Last, but not least, we shall refer to his letters to Edward T Sturdy of England. Swamiji wrote thirty-eight letters to him. The first letter from New York, dated 24 April 1895, appears to have been a reply to Sturdy's letter to him. (8.335) It is a bit formal and of a general nature. Swamiji's second, undated, letter to him is also formal and appears to have been written in reply to an invitation to visit England: 'I take your invitation as a Divine Call.' (8.336) In his letter of 2 August 1895, Swamiji appears to have been impressed by Sturdy, who seems to have written to Swamiji to form an organization. Swamiji also expresses his readiness to go to London. (8.346)

How fast the relationship grew can be gauged from his letter to Sturdy written just a week later, on 9 August 1895. It is a long letter full of serious discussion, reflecting Swamiji's growing interest in Sturdy, whom he has all along addressed as 'Dear Friend'. Swamiji's letter of 5 September 1895, written from Paris, reveals the strengthening of the bond, addressed as it is to 'Dear and Blessed Friend';

(8.350) Swamiji accepts Sturdy's invitation to be his guest. This sweet relationship continues for over four years, as we can see from Swamiji's letter from Ridgely Manor, written on 14 September 1899. (8.470) Amid the discussion on various personal and general matters, two sentences stand out boldly in the letter: 'I stick to my nature and principle—once a friend, always a friend ... the fault is mine, and mine only, for every wave of dislike and hatred that I get.' (8.472)

In his next, undated, letter also from Ridgely Manor, where he was recuperating, Swamiji is apologetic when he writes to Sturdy: 'It is quite probable that very much of your criticism is just and correct. ... I carry no feeling of disappointment even. I hope you will have no bitterness.' (8.478) Whatever the matter was, it does not end there. Sturdy must have written some nasty things to Swamiji that provoked him to show his mettle. The letter from New

These letters give us a glimpse of Swamiji's personality, which stands out as high, as varied and as shining as the mighty Himalayan peaks. He is a child to Mrs Hale and a father figure to Sister Nivedita, a leader to his gurubhais and a guiding force to his disciples.

York, written in November 1899, hit its target like a well-aimed missile. (7.515-9) Swamiji was forcing his mind to believe that his stay in England in 1895 and 1896 had been comfortable. At least he was showing the stoic forbearance of a sannyasin. But Sturdy's letter, full of false accusations and exaggerations, shook him out of his calm. Swamiji begins his letter by saying that he has 'nearly hypnotised myself into the belief that there has at least been a little oasis in the dreary desert of my life, a little spot of light in one whole life of misery and gloom ... when, lo, your last letter comes like a thunderclap, and the dream is vanished.'

(7.515)

The next paragraph of Swamiji's letter clarifies things: 'I remember your place at Reading, where I was fed with boiled cabbage and potatoes and boiled rice and boiled lentils, three times a day, with your wife's curses for sauce all the time. I do not remember your giving me any cigar to smoke—shilling or penny ones. Nor do I remember myself as complaining of either the food or your wife's incessant curses, though I *lived as a thief*, shaking through fear all the time, and working every day for you.' (7.516) Memories of all the ill-treatment that Swamiji had forgiven well up again. 'I remember,' he writes, 'Mrs Sturdy giving me a dinner and a night's lodging in her place, and then the next day criticising the black savage—so dirty and smoking all over the house.' (7.516) 'Would you like your children put into that dark hole you got for me in London, made to work to death, and almost starved all the time?' asks Swamiji plainly. 'Would Mrs Sturdy like that?' (7.518)

After pouring out his wrath in such straightforward language, Swamiji concludes his letter as a true sannyasin: 'You said a lot about ancient India. ... That India still lives, Sturdy, India of undying love, of everlasting faithfulness, the unchangeable, not only in manners and customs, but also in love, in faith, in friendship. And I, the least of that India's children, love you, Sturdy, with *Indian* love, and would any day give up a thousand bodies to help you out of this delusion.' (7.519) Only because Swamiji was touched to the quick by some uncharitable remarks made by Sturdy in his letter, does he lay the facts bare by way of setting the record straight. No doubt Swamiji's pen is fiery, but there is no condemnation of anyone, no vituperative language, no curses. And the letter ends on a note of everlasting love.

* * *

These few samples from Swamiji's letters show the wide spectrum of his personality;

but they hardly reveal that a number of them were written when he was facing financial constraints, moving from place to place, meeting total strangers, and undergoing all sorts of hardships as would enervate even a strong mind. Very often Swamiji did not know how he would spend the morrow. In the midst of all this, we find him guiding his gurubhais like a pole star, winning over such friends as the Seviars, the Leggetts and the Hales, transforming their lives, and crusading against fanatical missionaries. We find him describing for us the positive aspects of Western culture: its power of organization, its love of methodical work, its scientific progress and technological prowess; we find him firmly anchored in the teachings of his great master Sri Ramakrishna, forcing the Hindu religion out of the clutches of narrow-minded traditionalists and spreading its life-giving message far and wide. We find him sowing the seeds of religious harmony and laying the foundation for their comparative study. These letters give us a glimpse of Swamiji's personality, which stands out as high, as varied and as shining as the mighty Himalayan peaks. He is a child to Mrs Hale and a father figure to Sister Nivedita, a leader to his gurubhais and a guiding force to his disciples. He is as straightforward as he is humorous, as disapproving of tardiness as appreciative of greatness. In his worship of truth, Swamiji may be said to be Mahatma Gandhi's precursor. His letters flow like the deep and wide waters of the Ganga, purifying everyone and everything. Indeed, they display the full plumage of his cosmic personality.

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3. CW, 5.52.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras—An Exposition

SWAMI PREMESHANANDA

(Translated by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee)

Chapter 3 (continued)

23. *Sopakramanīṁ nirupakramanīṁ ca karma tat-saṁnyamād-aparānta-jñānam-arīṣṭebhyaḥ vā.*

Karma is of two kinds—soon to be fructified and late to be fructified. By making *saṁnyama* on these, or by the signs called *arīṣṭa*, [or the] portents [of death], the yogis know the exact time of separation from their bodies.

Comment: The impressions of karma done in earlier lives remain stored in the mind-stuff of a man. He is born in this life to experience the consequences of certain of these karmas, which represent his *prārabdha* ('those which are begun') karma. A yogi can discern how much of the *prārabdha* karma has

been worn out, how much remains, and how long it will take the remainder to get finished. Because of this he can know with certitude the exact time of his death. Also, there are certain other (special) portents that are known as *arīṣṭa*. A yogi can determine the time of his death by observing these too.

24. *Maitry-ādiṣu balāni.*

By making *saṁnyama* on friendship, mercy and so on (see aphorism 1.33), the yogi excels in the respective qualities.

25. *Baleṣu hasti-balādini.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the strength of the elephant and others, their respective strength comes to the yogi.

26. *Pravṛtṭy-āloka-nyāsāt sūkṣma-vyavahita-viprakṛṣṭa-jñānam.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the effulgent Light [in the heart] (see aphorism 1.36), comes the knowledge of the fine, the obstructed [things obstructed by barriers like mountains], and the remote.

27. *Bhuvana-jñānam sūrye saṁnyamāt.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the sun, (comes) the knowledge of the world.

28. *Candre tāra-vyūha-jñānam.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the moon, (comes) the knowledge of the cluster of stars.

29. *Dhruve tad-gati-jñānam.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the Pole Star, (comes) the knowledge of the motions of stars.

30. *Nābhicakre kāya-vyūha-jñānam.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the navel circle, (comes) the knowledge of the constitution of the

body.

31. *Kaṇṭha-kūpe kṣut-pipāsā-nivṛttiḥ.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the hollow of the throat, (comes) cessation of hunger [and thirst].

32. *Kūrma-nāḍyāṁ sthairyam.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the nerve called Kūrma [which, situated in the breast below the trachea, controls the breathing mechanism], (comes) fixity of the body [at the time of practice].

33. *Mūrdha-jyotiṣi siddha-darśanam.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the light emanating from the top of the head, [one gets the] sight of the *siddhas* [celestial beings].

34. *Prātibhād-vā sarvam.*

Or [naturally, without making *saṁnyama*,] by the power of *prātibha* [spontaneous enlightenment from purity], all [such] knowledge [can come to a person].

35. *Hṛdaye citta-saṁvit.*

[By making *saṁnyama*] on the heart, [comes the] knowledge of minds.

Comment: By means of the power of yoga, one can acquire extraordinary physical strength. One can know about things near at hand, things situated behind barriers, and also things far off—in fact, about everything in the three worlds. One can gain knowledge about the movement of the stars in the sky. Further, concentrating the mind in samadhi on different spots in one's body, one can be aware of all the states of the body. Also, one can suspend hunger and thirst and keep the entire body motionless. A kind of light emanates from

parts of the human body—the yogis can see that. When one concentrates the mind on the light emitted from the head, one can see divine personalities known as *siddhas*.

When the mind gradually passes on from the refined to the more refined and ultimately reaches the most refined state, the yogi develops such a faculty with the help of which he can see whatever he wants to see. By concentrating the mind on one's heart one can be aware of all the conditions of the mind-stuff.

36. *Sattva-puruṣayor-atyantāsaṁkīrṇayoḥ pratyayāviśeṣād bhogaḥ parārthatvāt svārtha-saṁnyamāt puruṣa-jñānam.*

Enjoyment comes from the non-discrimination of the Soul [Purusha] and *sattva* [a modification of Prakriti characterized by light and happiness], which are totally different because the latter's actions are for another [the Purusha]. *Saṁnyama* on the self-centred One [that is, *sattva* freed from egoism and illumined with the pure intelligence of Purusha and thus independent of all relations] gives the knowledge of the Purusha.

37. *Tataḥ prātibha-śrāvaṇa-vedanād-arśāsvāda-vārtā jāyante.*

From that [knowledge of the Purusha] arises the knowledge belonging to *prātibha* [spontaneous enlightenment] and (supernatural) hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling.

38. *Te samādhāv-upasargā vyutthāne siddhayaḥ.*

These are obstacles to samadhi; but they are powers in the worldly state.

Comment: Life means nothing but experi- | encing the consequences of certain actions.

The jiva forgets his own Self and feels that the intellect (buddhi) undifferentiated from itself is its 'I'. All activity is performed motivated by buddhi. But the jiva thinks that he is performing everything. As such he regards himself as experiencing all consequences of the acts. In course of hearing (*śravaṇa*) and reflecting on the truth (*manana*) about Brahman, the jiva acquires a little conception about Purusha. Then concentrating on the idea 'I am the Purusha', the jiva can rightly perceive that it is for the

sake of his own experience that the intellect performs all activity.

When this realization is well established, through his subtle body (not the gross organs) the yogi can derive joy out of supernatural sight, taste, sound, smell and touch. But such experiences spoil the concentrated state of the mind. These are just siddhis (concomitant acquisitions) of yoga, which are sources of joy to the experiencer when he is out of the state of samadhi.

39. *Bandha-kāraṇa-śaithilyāt pracāra-samvedanāc-ca cittasya para-śarīrāveśaḥ.*

When the cause of bondage of the mind has become loosened, the yogi, by his knowledge of its channels of activity (the nerves), can enter another's body.

Comment: If the mind can be kept absorbed in samadhi for a long time, the attraction towards the world gets loosened. Then the yogi can clearly see that the gross and sub-

tle bodies are totally different. Then, if he so wishes, he can come out of his own body and enter another body. Sri Shankaracharya performed such a feat.

40. *Udāna-jayāj-jala-paṅka-kaṇṭakādiṣv-asaṅga utkrāntiś-ca.*

By conquering the [nerve] current called *udāna* [which governs the lungs and the upper part of the body] the yogi does not sink in water or in swamps, he can walk on thorns and so on, and can die at will.

Comment: *Udāna* is a kind of action of the vital force. By mastering it by means of samadhi, the yogi can walk on water or thorns.

Also with the help of *udāna*, he can give up his body at will.

41. *Samāna-jayāt prajvalanam.*

By the conquest of the current *samāna* he is surrounded by a blaze of light.

Comment: By mastering the vital activity known as *samāna*, the yogi attains the power of emanating a blaze of light from his body. It has

been mentioned in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* that light used to emanate from the body of Yogi Girija.¹

42. *Śrotrākāśayoḥ sambandha-saṁnyamād-divyāni śrotram.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the relation between the ear and the *ākāśa* [one of the five elements, the omnipresent subtle material from which everything having form evolves] comes divine hearing.

Comment: When we hear any sound a vibration is created in the *ākāśa*; that comes and strikes against the ear. Our hearing organ is

built of the element *ākāśa*. By concentrating on the *ākāśa*, one can hear various kinds of divine sounds.

43. *Kāyākāśayoḥ sambandha-saṁnyamāl-laghu-tūla-samāpatteś-cākāśa-gamanam.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the relation between the *ākāśa* and the body and [also by] becoming light as cotton wool through meditation on them, the yogi goes through the skies.

Comment: Our body is made of *ākāśa*. If one fixes the mind on the idea that the body

and *ākāśa* represent the same material, then the body can be made as light as cotton wool.

As a result the yogi can fly about in the sky like | a bird.

44. *Bahir-akalpitaṁ vṛttir-mahā-videhā tataḥ prakāśāvarāṇa-kṣayaḥ.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the ‘real modifications’ of the mind, outside of the body, [which arise when there is absence of egoism in the body and which is] called great disembodiedness [*mahāvideha*], comes disappearance of the covering to light [that is, knowledge. As all darkness and ignorance vanish, everything appears to the yogi to be full of knowledge].

Comment: A yogi can concentrate on some outside object with so much intensity that he can forget that his subtle body, which shelters his mind, is housed within his gross body. It is just like a person who, staying in Kolkata, meditates on Kashi and in course of

such meditation feels exactly as if he is right there in Kashi. This is the state of *mahāvideha*. When a yogi attains this state his mind becomes completely cleansed of the attributes of rajas and tamas and his cognitive faculty becomes fully developed.

45. *Sthūla-svarūpa-sūkṣmānvayārthavattva-saṁnyamād-bhūtajayaḥ.*

By making *saṁnyama* on the gross and fine forms of the elements, their essential traits, the inherence of the gunas in them and on their contributing to the experience of the soul, comes the mastery of the elements.²

46. *Tato’nimādi-prādurbhāvaḥ kāyasampat-tad-dharmānabhighātaśca.*

From that comes minuteness [the capacity to make oneself as minute as a particle] and the rest of the powers, ‘glorification of the body’, and indestructibility of the bodily qualities.

47. *Rūpa-lāvanya-bala-vajra-saṁhananātvaṇi kāyasampat.*

The ‘glorification of the body’ is beauty, complexion, strength and adamant hardness.

Comment: The five elements are the constituents of our body. If one can fix the mind on their nature and activity and achieve full concentration, one gains total mastery over the five elements. As a result one acquires the eight powers³ beginning with minuteness;

there is unusual manifestation of bodily beauty; and the body attains adamant strength. Usually our body wears out and suffers from diseases according to natural laws. But external nature cannot affect a yogi who has achieved this kind of concentration.

(To be continued)

Notes (by Editor, Udbodhan)

1. This power of Girija was nullified by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna.
2. *Sthūla* is the perceptible state of the elements; *svārūpa*, the attributes of the elements such as hardness of earth and the fluidity of water; *sūkṣma*, the fine state or *tanmātra* of the elements; *anvaya*, the state of combination of sattva, rajas and tamas in each being; *arthavattva*, the ability to provide experience.

3. The eight powers are *aṇimā* (the power of becoming as minute as a particle), *laghimā* (the power of becoming light), *mahimā* or *garimā* (the power of becoming heavy), *prāpti* (the power of bringing distant things near oneself), *prākāmya* (the power of moving at will), *vaśitva* (the power of fascinating others), *īśitva* (the power of dominating others), and *kāmāvasāyitā* (the power of fulfilling one’s wish).

Don’t meet trouble halfway. It is quite capable of making the entire journey.

Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The rules for initiation into *sannyāsa* (continued)

नदीपुलिनशायी स्याद्देवागारेषु बाह्यतः ।

नात्यर्थं सुखदुःखाभ्यां शरीरमुपतापयेत् ॥१५॥

15. He shall sleep on the sands of a river [bank] or on the outside of temples. He shall not subject the body to [needless] affliction by excessive pleasure and pain.

स्नानं पानं तथा शौचमद्भिः पूताभिराचरेत् ।

स्तूयमानो न तुष्येत निन्दतो न शपेत्परान् ॥१६॥

16. He shall use clean water for bathing, drinking and cleaning. He shall not rejoice when praised, nor shall he curse others when reviled.

भिक्षादि वैदलं पात्रं स्नानद्रव्यमवारितम् ।

एवं वृत्तिमुपासीनो यतेन्द्रियो जपेत्सदा ॥१७॥

विश्वायमनुसंयोगं मनसा भावयेत्सुधीः ॥१८॥

17, 18. For [receiving] alms and the like, he shall [use] a bowl made of leaves; for bathing (ablutions), he shall use mud (fresh earth) as the unavoidable (necessary) ingredient. Thus devoting himself to the [monastic] vocation [as described above], [the ascetic monk] shall perform *japa* (that is, chant or repeat with devoted concentration) [spiritual] *mantras*.¹ The enlightened [ascetic monk] shall contemplate in his mind the universally expansive (all-pervading, infinite) [Consciousness] and Its conjunction with that which measures It, [as it were] [that is, *pranava*, or *Om*].²

The distinction between the five elements and their universal substratum

विश्वाधिष्ठानात् पञ्चभूतानां भेदः

आकाशाद्वायुर्वायोर्ज्योतिर्ज्योतिष आपोऽद्भ्यः पृथिवी । एतेषां भूतानां ब्रह्म प्रपद्येऽजरममरमक्षरं प्रपद्ये ॥१९॥

19. [From the universal Substratum, Brahman, arose *ākāśa*]; from *ākāśa* [arose] air (*vāyu*); from air (*vāyu*) [arose] fire (*agni*, or *jyoti*); from fire [arose] water (*ap*); from water [arose] earth (*prithvi*). I resort to (take refuge in) Brahman [which is the prime Cause and Substratum]³ of these elements. I resort to (take refuge in) the ageless (timeless), immortal, immutable (indestructible) Brahman.⁴

The expression of an ascetic monk's spiritual experiences

यतेः स्वानुभवप्रकटनम्

मय्यखण्डसुखाम्भोधौ बहुधा विश्ववीचयः ।

उत्पद्यन्ते विलीयन्ते मायामारुतविभ्रमात् ॥२०॥

20. In the [infinite] ocean of Indivisible Joy (Bliss) that I am [in my true nature as the Atman/Brahman], waves of multitudes of universes arise [are produced] and get merged on account of the winds of the bewitching sport of maya.⁵

न मे देहेन संबन्धो मेघेनेव विहायसः ।

अतः कुतो मे तद्धर्मा जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्तिषु ॥२१॥

21. I have [absolutely] no connection with the body, [even] as the clouds are [unattached] to the sky. Hence, wherefore are its (the body's) characteristics in me in the [states of] waking, dreaming and deep sleep?⁶

आकाशवत्कल्पविदूरगोऽहमादित्यवद्भास्यविलक्षणोऽहम् ।

आहार्यवन्नित्यविनिश्चलोऽहमम्भोधिवत्पारविवर्जितोऽहम् ॥२२॥

22. I am far away (remote) from mental ideas, like the sky (*ākāśa*). I am different from [the body and the senses, even] as the sun is [different] from the objects that it illumines. I am absolutely immovable, ever like the unshakable [Meru] mountain. I am limitless (infinite) like the ocean.

(To be continued)

Notes

1. This *japa* is in fact a repeated remembrance of the *sannyāsa* mantras, including the *mahāvākyas*, meant for attaining mental purification in the case of *vividīṣā sannyāsins*; see endnote for mantra 11 in the March 2004 issue).
2. The word used in the text is *viśvāyam*, which Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets as *viśvāyatanam*, meaning 'universally expansive'. *Manu* is *praṇava* or *Om*, which measures, as it were, the Infinite; the conjunction of the two is the oneness of *para* and *apara* Brahman, which is the meaning of *praṇava*. Thus, it is nothing but the meaning of the *mahāvākya*, 'Ahaṁ brahmāsmi, I am Brahman.' The *sannyāsin* shall always contemplate this identity of his own Self with the infinite Brahman.
3. The five elements, namely *ākāśa*, *vāyu*, *agni*, *ap* and *prithvi*, are the effects of Brahman, which is the supreme Cause. Since the effect is non-different from the cause, it is quite befitting that the spiritual aspirant speaks of taking refuge in Brahman, which is the Substratum on which all the elements are, as it were, superimposed (*adhyāropa*) and which is revealed in Its real nature as It is by the process of de-superimposition (*apavāda*).
4. To eliminate the idea of any change, decay and death in the undecaying, deathless, eternal Brahman (when thought of as the Substratum of the superimposition), it is repeatedly asserted that Brahman, which is timeless, immortal and immutable, is what is being resorted to as the aspirant's refuge.
5. See *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā*, 2.23, 25.
6. In my true *svarūpa* (nature) as the Atman, I have absolutely no connection with the gross, subtle or causal bodies, which play their part in the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states when associated with the respective egos.

I can assure you that you will attain liberation and peace if you but free yourself from lust and greed. He who can say, 'God is my own. I love Him and without Him I cannot live!'—be he a monk or a householder—is great. Peace will follow him.

—Swami Premananda

Glimpses of Holy Lives

The Devotee Whom God Loves

The Peshwa rewarded Jyoti Pant by putting him in charge of the important fort Purandargarh and requested his assistance in administrative matters. Thus Jyoti achieved high status almost overnight. He now had his parents brought over from their village in Satara. So implicit was the Peshwa's faith in Jyoti that when the Pathans attacked the Maratha kingdom, he requested Jyoti to be with him on the battlefield.

One night on this expedition, Jyoti heard a divine command in a dream: 'It is time now for you to go to Varanasi. Prepare yourself to receive the Lord's grace.' The very next morning Jyoti resigned his position and, giving away all his belongings to the brahmins and the needy, set out for the holy city.

For six months Jyoti immersed himself in devotional practices. From morning to noon he would make *japa* standing in waist-deep water at the Manikarnika Ghat. Then he would go into the city to beg his food, which he offered to Lord Vishwanatha before partaking of the *prasad*.

Vyasa's Blessings

One morning at the river, Jyoti was disturbed in his devotions by an uncouth person who looked like an outcast. The man was cavorting in the water as if there was nobody else nearby. When Jyoti rebuked him, the outcast grinned mischievously and even splashed some water on Jyoti's face! As an incensed Jyoti glared ... the outcast transformed himself into ... none other than the divine sage Vyasa himself!

Vyasa said to the devotee, 'My dear Jyoti, the days of austerity and formal devotion are over for you. Tonight I will give you a copy of the sacred *Bhagavata* at the Vyasa Mandapa.

You will find in it all the knowledge and love you are seeking. So sleep at the Vyasa Mandapa tonight, I will see you there.' Then the sage initiated Jyoti with a Vishnu mantra.

That night, as instructed, Jyoti spread his bed at the Vyasa Mandapa. When he awoke the next morning, he found the scripture beside his pillow. From that day, Jyoti began to spend the major part of his time studying the *Bhagavata*, reciting its verses and trying to discover their inner meaning.

Vishwanatha's Grace

One day, as Jyoti was reciting from the *Bhagavata*, an old brahmin came and stood by his side listening to his recitation. Jyoti paid no attention. After a while, however, Jyoti's tongue began to falter inexplicably and words tumbled out rather incoherently. Some powerful influence, Jyoti did not know what, emanating from the brahmin seemed to overwhelm him.

'Aha!' said the amused brahmin with a twinkle in his eyes. 'I didn't know this was how pundits read the scriptures!' That instant Jyoti recognized Lord Vishwanatha and fell at His feet. 'Arise, Jyoti,' the Lord said with great affection. 'Your desire has been fulfilled. You have now become both a *jnani* and a *bhakta*. Now you must go forth and set an example to the people, and work for their welfare.'

Coming to know of Jyoti Pant's spirituality within a short time, the pundits of Varanasi began to revere him as a Mahabhagavata, a great devotee. After some days Jyoti Pant returned to Maharashtra, where he travelled widely, established temples and did much to popularize the religion of devotion.

His most important work was a Marathi translation of the *Bhagavata*. *

‘Yogakshemam Vahamyaham’

Thirukkadavur was part of the Chola kingdom. Nayanar had a self-appointed duty in the Shiva temple there. He offered frankincense in the huge incense burner held by an iron tripod in front of the temple. The fragrance from it wafted across the entire temple.

Fragrant Service

Nayanar had no other occupation. He left home early in the morning with a load of incense and returned home only after the temple was closed for the day. His ancestral property and bags of incense saw him through. His was a pure life, free from ambitions. He dedicated his life to worship, firmly rooted in the conviction that his duty was just to serve the Lord; He would take care of the rest. Even as the incense spent itself in the fire, Nayanar spent himself entirely in serving his Lord.

The Test

With his wealth depleting fast, Nayanar soon reached a hand-to-mouth existence. Soon harder days were upon him. He had no more incense with him; his family didn't know where the next meal would come from. From her *mangalasutra* (the sacred golden ornament strung on a holy thread a Hindu ties around his wife's neck during marriage), his wife removed the ornament and handed it to him, requesting him to get some paddy in exchange. With a heavy heart Nayanar set out for the market. More than anything, he was worried about the lack of incense to offer at the temple.

God above Everything

When he finalized the deal for paddy in exchange of the ornament, smell of incense wafted across from nearby. He saw a vendor with a bag of frankincense on his head. Nayanar immediately rushed to him, ornament in

hand.

'I would like to have the entire bag. How much will it cost?'

The ornament and the incense bag changed hands. Oblivious of his starving family, Nayanar rushed to the temple and deposited the incense at the temple store. Immensely glad at having found incense for his Lord, Nayanar spent the day in the temple, happily resuming his fragrant duty.

The Deliverance

That night Shiva appeared before his wife in a dream and told her: 'Don't worry. Your house is now full of riches.' His wife awoke with a start and found herself surrounded by wealth. She rushed to the kitchen and started cooking for her husband and children.

The Lord appeared before Nayanar too, asleep at the temple: 'My dear, you are very hungry and tired. Return to your house for a sumptuous meal.' Nayanar returned home and was amazed to find wealth all over. 'How come all this, my dear!' he exclaimed. She recounted to him her dream. Nayanar gladly accepted his Lord's gift and continued his service at the temple for many years.

The Power of Devotion

For long, the Shivalinga at the Thiruppanandal temple was not vertical, but slightly askew. The Chola king was concerned about it and tried to straighten the linga by having it pulled by elephants by means of a rope. Nothing happened. Then Nayanar went to the temple. Tying the rope to his own neck, he pulled at the linga—and the linga straightened itself!

Nayanar came to be called Kungiliyakalaya ('incense burner') Nayanar and is adored as one of the sixty-three Shaiva saints of Tamil Nadu. *



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

How to Master Change in Your Life. Mary Carroll Moore. New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. 2001. E-mail: nab@vsnl.in. xiv + 364 pp. Rs 395.

Scores of books have been written by many authors about how to effect changes in one's life-style, to make it meaningful. Each one is distinctive in approach. Life is not a cakewalk. Every author approaches life's challenges from his personal experiences—triumphs as well as defeats, victories as well as vicissitudes, sweet as well as bitter experiences. Doesn't it require uncommon courage and clarity of expression backed by profound thinking to be outspoken and frank? This is what Mary Carroll Moore has exhibited in her path-breaking book. In twelve chapters she has covered sixty-seven ways to handle life's toughest moments!

This book is autobiographical, anecdotal as well as educative, replete with appropriate quotations from eminent thinkers. This is not a novel to be read casually or hurriedly. Every now and then one has to halt, reflect and also carry out the exercises given in plenty. It is bound to be beneficial.

Each one of us has a starved place and each of us knows deep down what is needed to fill that place. To find the courage to trust and honour the search, to follow the voice that tells us what we need to do even when it doesn't seem to make sense, is a worthy pursuit. Each life cycle has a growth and fulfilment stage. We switch back and forth between them. The growth stage begins with the restless feeling that urges us into a new and greater opportunity. But fear holds us back. Finally the need for growth outweighs the fear!

Moore has gone through several rough patches and traumatic experiences in her life. Rather than getting sunk in despondency and indulging in self-pity, she has remarkably used each crisis as a turning point to usher in a refreshing phase of living. This is the adrenalin recommended for the weak-minded. The author has enumerated the benefits of living at a slower pace, rather than a high-strung,

busy life. In her own words, '(1) Slowing down makes me restful inside and gathers my strength; (2) If I slow down and pace myself, I will have more energy for whatever life asks me to do; (3) Slowing down fills the well of creativity. I get great ideas when I am not rushing through life; (4) Slowing down is more peaceful. My family likes it when I am more peaceful; (5) I am more graceful when I move slower; (6) I feel more of the natural abundance of life; there is less scarcity in my thinking when I slow down; (7) Slowing helps me focus on the moment.'

Moore has felt spiritual experiences several times in her life. She firmly believes in divine intervention in times of crisis. According to her, spirituality is not reserved for saints and clergy. It is right here, in our lives, every day! In her own religion, Eckankar, she has learned that spirituality underlies everything she has done.

This book must be in the personal library of every literate individual.

Prof S Dandapani

Former Professor of Educational Psychology
Regional Institute of Education, Mysore

A Disciple's Journal: In the Company of Swami Ashokananda. Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke). Kalpa Tree Press, 65 East 96th Street, Suite 12D, New York, NY 10128. E-mail: kalpatree@aol.com. 2003. xxii + 298 pp. \$ 14.95. Copies can also be had from Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. E-mail: advaita@vsnl.com. Rs 350.

A renowned monk of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ashokananda was initiated into spiritual life in a mysterious way by Swami Vivekananda in 1912, ten years after the passing away of Swami Vivekananda. The genuineness of the initiation was later confirmed by as many as four of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. After serving in

India as an illustrious editor of the Order's prestigious magazine *Prabuddha Bharata* from 1926 to 1931, Swami Ashokananda was deputed to work in the United States. As Swami Ashokananda left for the States, Dr S Radhakrishnan remarked, 'There goes the best brain in India.' Later he remarked in France that Swami Ashokananda was one of the two or three original thinkers in India. Jawaharlal Nehru recognized in Swami Ashokananda an intellectual, a philosopher and a savant.

From 1931 until his passing away in 1969, Swami Ashokananda assiduously developed the Order's centres at San Francisco, Berkeley, Sacramento, Olema and Oakland. As a guru, he initiated, nurtured and stimulated the spiritual progress of a number of American disciples. One such disciple who became notable later on was Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi), the author of this book.

Marie Louise Burke came in contact with Ashokananda in 1948 and was captivated by his personality at the very first meeting. She started attending his lectures regularly and was uplifted by his brilliant thoughts charged with energy, which at times burst into flames and created a dynamic, rarefied atmosphere.

From the very start, Marie Louise Burke carefully jotted down the thought-flashes of her guru, mostly during private conversations with him. From the notes, which have been published in the form of this book, one cannot but notice that Ashokananda had a task clearly cut out for her. And that was to undertake and publish research works on Swami Vivekananda's visits to the United States.

We can find in this diary, in at least thirty places, Swami Ashokananda laboriously guiding and prodding Marie Louise Burke into developing and honing her writing skills. Initially, the swami asks her to write about the visits of several swamis of the Order to the San Francisco centre. Gradually, he trains her to expand her writings: 'Take each swami chronologically as he came here. Make a list of everything about them. Then relate them to a larger thing—their work in the United States, the works of Swami Vivekananda; then relate that to a larger thing—to Sri Ramakrishna; then relate that to a still larger thing—the universal,' he tells her.

Marie Louise Burke devotedly performed life-long researches on Swami Vivekananda's visits to the United States and Europe and published them in a monumental six-volume classic *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, which have

greatly enriched Vivekananda literature and attracted the attention of Vedanta students worldwide.

When Marie Louise Burke asked her guru whether she could write his biography, Swami Ashokananda consented, but only on condition that she took it up after completing the research works on Swami Vivekananda. True to his bidding, she published the biography of Swami Ashokananda under the title *A Heart Poured Out* and its companion volume, *A Disciple's Journal* in 2003 at her advanced age of 93.

A Disciple's Journal vividly portrays the struggles of the earnest disciple, her self-doubts, her initial problems as a writer, and the constant chidings, admonitions and encouragements of her ever-affectionate father-like guru, even as she traverses through the low and high points of her spiritual journey.

At the time this review was being written, the media announced the sad news of the passing away of Sister Gargi.

We may justifiably believe that she was chosen by God for a specific mission on earth and she gave up the mortal coil happily after fulfilling the assignment to her entire satisfaction.

A book which stands out from the rest both in content and convention.

Swami Abhiramananda
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya
Coimbatore

Sri Krishna and the Kuru Princes. S Ramana Rao. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in 2002. iii + 264 pp. Rs 180.

Since time immemorial, the two great Indian Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, have fascinated millions—the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the religious and the atheists. The epics touch the sentiments, feelings and emotions, and also stir 'reason' to the core. The reader or the listener is impressed by the truth, strength and righteousness contained in them.

In this book under review the author has tried to bring out the essence of the *Mahabharata* in story form. Unfortunately, as the author acknowledges, his task remained incomplete because of old age and illness, and all that he could achieve was partial

presentation of the epic. The stories contained in this book relate to the hatred and jealousy of Duryodhana towards the Pandavas; his attempt to put an end to their lives in the lac house; the subsequent escape of the Pandavas (tipped by Vidura) to Varanavata; the story of Bhima and Hidimba; and marriage with Draupadi. Later, as a compromise, Dhritarashtra gives the Khandava forest to the Pandavas; they build their prosperous empire and perform the Rajasuya yajna; Bhima kills the mighty Jarasandha; and lastly the ill-fated story of gambling—the play of dice with the subsequent loss, insult and exile.

These stories are highly absorbing and educative. Most of the Indians have heard them in one form or other in their childhood, as told and retold by grandparents, heard on radio, enacted on stage, and shown on TV and other media. The author has very nicely narrated thirty-seven such stories. The language is superb and the style is mature. Hence the book is effective in its objective of captivating the interest of the reader. However, I feel, instead of going into details, the author could have increased the scope and coverage of the book by shorter narration of each story. This is because, for those who do not know the story of the *Mahabharata* this collection of selected portions may not be of much use. They may not be able to make out much from these stories. Therefore it is felt that the author could have made some arrangement to add the remaining portions of the epic to these stories. Thus the necessary completeness could have been achieved.

Dr C S Shah
Medical Consultant
Aurangabad

Meditation: Science and Practice. N C Panda. DK Print World, Sri Kunj, F-52 Balinagar, New Delhi 110 015. E-mail: dkprintworld@vsnl.net. 2003. xvi + 336 pp. Rs 280.

Meditation as a means to calm down the mind and to reach a state of absorption in the Divine has been known for quite a long time. There are several schools of meditation not only in Hinduism but also in other religions. Several books have been written on this subject in the recent past for the benefit of practitioners.

The book under review is one such. It is divided into three parts: Practice of Meditation, Theory of

Meditation and Benefits of Meditation. This is an unusual kind of division because the usual way is to present the theory first, followed by its practice and benefits. The author has not given any reason why he has opted for this kind of presentation.

The first part commences abruptly with the preparation needed for the practice. This is followed by a chapter on the standard asanas, mudras and *bandhas* according to hatha yoga practice. However, no distinction has been made between mudras as symbolic hand gestures and mudras as body positions. The *bandhas* have been described according to the standard practice.

In the chapter on pranayama, the author has included some aspects of *shatkarma*, which could have been included along with *bandhas* and mudras. Techniques of *pratyahara* are briefly described without any elaboration. The last chapter in Part 1 describes *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, whose theoretical description comes only later.

The second part, on the theory of meditation, is a collage of various descriptions of meditation according to the Upanishads, the *Gita*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and other texts. There is no systematic development of the theme; all the chapters appear to be like independent essays put together.

The third and the last part on benefits from meditation goes into great detail about the pathophysiology of stress, the structure of the brain and psychopathology of the mind. These chapters can be understood only by those familiar with the subject of anatomy and physiology. For others it makes rather hard reading. It is only towards the end of this part that the author refers to mental and spiritual health.

The book appears to contain a lot of information from various sources, without focusing its attention on any specific issues. It makes a good reference work on meditation. However, whether it could be directly applied in practice will depend upon the practitioner. It is obvious that if one has to follow the practice as described in the first part, one should be familiar with standard hatha yogic practices.

The book would have been more useful if the practices had been presented taking into account the diverse nature of people who are likely to take to meditation.

Dr N V C Swamy
Former Director, Indian Institute of Technology
Chennai

❧ Reports ❧

Inaugurated. A new hall meant to be used for educational and cultural purposes; by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Belur Math; on 6 January 2004.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission, Along; by Mr Lijum Roniya, Minister for Power, Arunachal Pradesh; on 8 January. Mr Roniya inaugurated the centre's annual celebrations.

Celebrated. The golden jubilee of Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore; from 9 to 11 January. On the 9th Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, Union Minister for Human Resource Development inaugurated the Vidyashala's Golden Jubilee Block and addressed a meeting where Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, gave the inaugural address. Sri S M Krishna, Chief Minister of Karnataka, presided over the meeting. Defence Minister Mr

George Fernandes, Karnataka Governor Sri T N Chaturvedi and several other eminent persons also spoke on different occasions. Highlights of the 3-day celebration: a grand multimedia programme on Sri Ramakrishna held in an open-air stadium, a cultural event depicting the music and dance traditions of India from the Vedic up to the modern period, various exhibitions, and the release of a commemorative souvenir and a first-day cover.

Observed. National Youth Day; by branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission all over India; on 12 January. The programmes mainly consisted of cultural events and were attended by dignitaries.

Conducted. An international seminar on 'Life, Mind and Consciousness'; by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata;

from 16 to 18 January. Dr Murli Manohar Joshi inaugurated the seminar and opened an exhibition titled *Can Artificial Intelligence Manifest the Highest Possibilities of Human Mind?* organized on the occasion. The seminar was attended by 20 eminent scholars from India and abroad.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur; by Dr Raman Singh, Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh; on 17 January. Dr Singh inaugurated an eye camp organized by the centre.

Demonstrated. Live laparoscopic-surgery; at Vivekanan-



Dr Murli Manohar Joshi inaugurating the celebrations by lighting the lamp.
Also seen (from left): Swami Atmavidanandaji (President), Sri S Balaji (Principal), Swami Smarananandaji, Sri S M Krishna and Swami Muktidanandaji (Correspondent)

da Polyclinic, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow; by Drs P K Chowbey of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, Praveen Bhatia, Anil Sharma and David Lomento of Singapore; on 18 January. Dr Chowbey's surgery of the thyroid was the highlight of the occasion, it being the first time that such an operation was conducted at a workshop. The visiting faculty certified that the Polyclinic's surgical facilities were world class and that it ought to have a separate department for minimal-access surgery as soon as possible.

Dedicated. A new Ramakrishna temple; by Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum; on 23 January (Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj's birthday). Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, who was to perform the dedication, could not go to Belgaum because of a slight indisposition.

The 5-day celebration began on the 21st with consecration ceremonies and purifica-



A view of the prayer hall

tory rites like *vastupuja* and *ganahoma*. On the 23rd morning a solemn procession of sanniyasins and brahmacharins left the Vivekananda Memorial carrying the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda and circumambulated the new temple three times before entering it. Thanks to a teleconferencing arrangement, Most Revered President Maharaj could witness the dedication ceremony in real time from his room in Bangalore. Over 315 sadhus and 5500 devotees participated in the function. On this sacred occasion 123 devotees were given mantra diksha by Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj on the 23rd and 24th.



The new Ramakrishna temple with the Vivekananda Memorial in the foreground

Each day there were early morning prayers and two public meetings in the morning and evening, where, in addition to several senior sadhus of the Ramakrishna Order, Sri Prabhu Chennabasava Swamiji, Chandrasekhara Swamiji and Tontada Siddhalinga Swamiji, pontiffs of local Lingayat maths, addressed the audience. Budding artists presented attractive cultural program-

mes in between the public meetings, and on all evenings there were musical concerts from renowned musicians. Two photo exhibitions on the lives and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were also arranged.

Smt Sonia Gandhi, President of the Congress Party, along with Sri S M Krishna and other cabinet ministers of the Karnataka Government visited the Ashrama on the 23rd to inaugurate the administrative block on the ground floor of the temple complex. On the 24th Sri T N Chaturvedi addressed the morning public meeting. Sri Sompal, Member of the Planning Commission, Government of India, was the chief guest at the concluding session on the 25th.

Secured. The following top ranks; by students of Vivekananda College run by Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai; at the graduate and postgraduate examinations held by the University of Madras. Graduate level: 1st and 8th (Chemistry); 9th (Mathematics); 2nd (Botany); 4th (Computer Applications); 5th (Economics); 1st (History); 1st, 2nd and 3rd (Sanskrit); Postgraduate level: 2nd, 3rd and 4th (Chemistry); 5th (Mathematics); 1st (Botany); 4th and 5th (Economics); 1st and 4th (Philosophy); 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th (Sanskrit).

Scored. Cent per cent marks in most of the subjects; by a student of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar; at the all-India secondary school examinations conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education. The Government of India honoured the student by inviting him to witness the Republic Day parade from the Prime Minister's box as a special guest.

Secured. 2nd rank in electrical engineering; by a student of Ramakrishna Mission Shilpa-mandira, Belur; at the diploma examination conducted by the State Council of Technical Education, West Bengal.

Organized. A medical relief camp; jointly by Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha, and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip; in Sagar Island; during the Makara Sankranti Mela between 11 and 15 January. 3865 patients were treated, of whom 33 required indoor medical care. Besides, 150 blankets and 100 assorted garments were given away to monks and poor pilgrims. The Manasadwip centre provided free board and lodging facilities for 600 pilgrims at the Mela area and at the centre.

Distributed. 6300 kg rice, 346 kg dal, 629 kg salt, 1697 kg potatoes and 1492 items of clothing; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; among 1266 families working in tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district; in January. The families were affected by a spate of violent attacks on them.

Distributed. 1295 blankets and 159 warm garments; by various branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission; among poor people affected by a severe winter; in different parts of the country; in January.

Distributed. 2540 kg rice, 1270 kg dal, 266 dhotis, 352 saris and 278 assorted children's garments; by Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai; among 254 poor families in Nasik district; in January. *

Hospitality must be extended even towards an enemy who comes to your house; the tree does not withdraw its shade from the woodcutter.

—Indian proverb